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# The Unwelcome Mrs. Hatch

By

Mrs. Burton Harrison

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# The Unwelcome Mrs. Hatch

## I

IN a well-furnished room of a good hotel in the smart residential quarter of New York a stout-armed Irishwoman was in the act of drawing together a pair of chintz curtains over an alcove bed. The neat little brass bedstead, the pattern of the chintz and of the Brussels carpet, the ash furniture, the electric fixtures, the lace window-curtains and the steam radiator, like gilded organ-pipes, had been so often imprinted on the retina of Miss Biddy McCluskey's eye, in her daily whiskings through many such apartments as sixth-floor chambermaid of the Stuyvesantia, that it was strange she should single out the temporary owner of this particular apartment for meditative comment.



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"She's a beaut, is No. 1089," she observed to a bell-boy who had come up with a parcel. "Not so young as some, but the real thing in manners. Must ha' kep' lots o' help in her time, private house, Fifth Avenue style, like the ones I always lived wid before I took up wid hotels. Tell you something, Jimmy—she ain't more'n laid on the outside o' that bed all night, and she come all the way from Californy, so she says."

"Aw, wot are ye givin' me!" was the self-sufficient answer. "I don't advertise myself for no mind reader, but I see No. 1089 wuz in trouble w'en I lifted her bags up here last night. Guv me a quarter for myself just to take a tellygram down to the office below, let alone anudder quarter an' a penny for de stamp, an' den dropped herself down dere on de sofa, and was tuk wid a fit o' de shivers. See?"

"You didn't happen to *read* that telegram, sonny?" asked Miss McCluskey, while indulging in the lightning act of passing a

feather duster over smooth surfaces conveniently at hand.

"Marry me on yer next Sunday out, an' I'll tell yer all my secrets," retorted the boy, provokingly, then carried his sauce and his buttony exterior out of reach of her avenging duster.

Scarcely had the door of No. 1089 closed behind the bell-boy, and Miss McCluskey relapsed into a long, leisurely survey of her charms in the mirror, when there was a hesitating knock. To the chambermaid's tart invitation to come in responded a mysterious, battered-looking creature, with a futile attempt at gentility in his get-up, who insinuated himself into the aperture he had created and gave a comprehensive glance around the room.

"Well, what's up?" asked the McCluskey, rebukingly.

"Don't let me incommode you, miss," was the suave answer. "It is only—er—a little business I have with the lady. She won't want to miss me, sure."

"She ain't in," snapped the chambermaid, whose life was spent on guard against wayfarers and strangers.

"Oh, never mind. I'll wait," returned the visitor, complacently.

Somehow, with all her experience, Biddy thought she had never met such shifty yet universally inquisitive eyes. They seemed to bore through wood and metal, looking-glass and stuffs, and to read the innermost motives of her being. The poor thing thought of the dollar bill she had found in the bureau drawer in No. 1101 a day or two before, and of an embroidered pocket handkerchief, tucked between the tufted seat and back of an armchair in No. 1090, that she had appropriated without mentioning the fact at the desk. She faltered as she tried to regain her usual masterful tone.

"If the lady wanted youse so much, why didn't you send up your card?"

"She'll understand," the man answered, pushing further in, and at last standing on

the hearth-rug, while still continuing his rapid survey of the room and its contents.

"I remember, now, I heard her mention down the tube that if a gentleman calls she'll be back at ten-thirty, sharp."

"A gentleman, eh?" said the stranger, with animation.

"So it ain't you; see?" replied Miss McCluskey, who was regaining her usual form. "Come, now; git outside, or I'll call down the trumpet and have the porters up."

"I'm afraid you are hasty, my dear miss," said the stranger, dropping into a chair. "The truth is, you suspect me; but a lady of your tact and intelligence should know better."

As he spoke he was reading the labels on the trunk nearest him—a lady's dress-basket, covered with tarpaulin, smart, up-to-date and newly lettered.

"A long journey Mrs. Hatch has had from 'Frisco, hasn't she? Mr. Hatch with her?" he went on.

"Mr. Nobody's with her!" exclaimed the woman, indignantly. "If yer want to ask questions, go down to the office."

"Come to think of it, I won't wait, but will just leave a note saying I'll call again," observed the visitor, as an apparent afterthought. "She'll be so sorry to have missed her old friend!"

Gliding into a chair set behind a fanciful and uncomfortable little hotel desk strewn with a few open papers and writing materials, he affected to scribble a few lines on a sheet of white paper. In the brief time that he sat there even Miss McCluskey's suspicious eyes did not keep pace with his swift investigation of everything within his reach — though she observed he slipped every drawer open noiselessly and peeped inside.

Apparently nothing rewarded this exploration by Mrs. Hatch's old friend. In a very few moments he got up, crumpled the paper he had written and put it in his pocket, declaring he had changed his mind

and would leave a message for her at the office; then, wishing the ample Biddy a polite good-day, started for the door.

"Good luck go wid ye!" observed the woman, with animus.

"Good-bye, miss; no offense, I hope, but —" and he slipped a dollar into her hand— "No. 1089 is O. K., as far as you have seen?"

"I'm not up till yer low questions, anyway," returned Biddy, indignantly pushing the money back into his grasp.

"On the square, savey? Keeps no company, orders no cigarettes or cocktails in her room, uses no hypodermics or morphine?" he explained, pleasantly.

"An' is it yer 'old friend' yer asking that about?" cried she, angrily. "Sure I know yer sort at last. Ye'r' a detective, bad cess to yer ugly mug. She's a perfect lady, I tell ye, and that's all ye'll get out o' me, if ye stop here till ye take root."

"No offense, no offense," repeated the man, imperturbably, as she fairly forced him

into retreat and slammed and locked the door.

The next knock revealed nothing more alarming than a District Messenger boy carrying a neat little parcel, wrapped in jeweler's style, and sealed at either end.

"Special, C. O. D.," recited the lad, briefly. "Told me at office lady left orders she'd be in at 10.30."

"You look like the right article, so wait there," replied the maid, leaving the door on the crack while she finished her task, hurrying into seclusion a pair of shoes with trim buckles, and venturing to try around her own throat a long feather-boa before she laid it in a drawer.

Punctually, as a bell in a neighboring clock tower struck the half-hour after ten, the soft rustle of a woman's skirts came up the corridor from the elevator door and paused before No. 1089.

"Oh! you are there? That's very nice," said a peculiarly soft and low cadenced voice. "I see the door's open, so the maid

must be still inside. Come in, please, till I settle our account."

Once in a while there is found a District Messenger boy who has human emotions, and this one responded, as did the rest of the world in general to Marian Hatch's greeting, with a smile. She was a tall, slim woman, youthful of form and face, and—though the wells of her deep eyes were brimming with the emotions of sad experience—extremely pretty still, graceful in every one of her impulsive movements, and of a personal distinction in appearance and bearing that marked her as belonging to the higher-cultured class. Her tailor-made costume of dark gray was severely cut, but stylish, while her large black hat and nodding plumes made a picture of the charming face beneath, and she held a couple of American beauty roses in her hand.

"You have done my room nicely, and just in time," she said to the maid, who, assuming an attitude of subservience foreign

to her usual demeanor, responded with a grin, and softly disappeared.

Then the lady, taking off her gloves, veil, and hat, threw them carelessly on the sofa, and relieving the boy of his parcel, dropped into a chair by the little table in the center of the room. As she broke the seals she glanced with happy eyes at the box's contents, then at the accompanying bill.

"Quite right. Here is the money. Receipt the bill, please," she went on, holding the box and falling into a sort of half-dream, while the lad, producing a stub pencil, moistened it on his lips, and stretching on the wall the paper she had handed him signed it laboriously.

The messenger had been gone for some time, when she started from her reverie and took up her open portemonnaie from the table.

"Bless me!" she exclaimed. "That innocent Mercury little knew how nearly this payment has cleaned me out. But never mind, so long as it gives *her* pleasure! Now,

I must get into shape to receive a visit from my traveling companion across the continent. He will be punctual. He has all the virtues, has Jack Adrian."

Another knock at her much-beleaguered door, and Jimmy entered, card on tray, mechanically repeating :

"Gentleman for 1089."

"Ask the gentleman to come up," she said, after a glance at the card. Then, with a hasty look at herself in the mirror, she resumed her seat, taking up her roses and toying with them a little nervously.

"I wanted, of all things, to receive Jack Adrian as a lady should," passed through her mind. "Dear, honest boy, he knows as little as the District Messenger boy does how near I am to being stone broke. After my journey here, and sundry purchases, I can afford to keep this room just one week —and after that, the deluge!"

Then she was shaking hands, simply and cordially, with a young man of handsome face and cheery presence. He carried a

large bunch of lilies-of-the-valley wrapped in soft paper, which, with some awkwardness, he offered for her acceptance.

"You see, I took you at your word, and called abominably early," he said. "Have these? I picked them up at a florist's as I came along in the hansom, and thought maybe you'd like 'em."

"Like them!" cried Marian, rapturously burying her face in their fragrance. "If you knew how sinfully I always covet flowers—all flowers—everybody's flowers! I couldn't resist buying these poor roses in the street just now. Yours are so beautifully fresh and crisp! They will last for days and keep Spring in my heart!"

"Glad you're pleased," he answered, sitting opposite her, hat and stick in hand, the image of conventional respectability and wholesomeness. "I'd meant to drop in anyway this morning to ask if you'd rested after our tiresome journey, and whether you'd met your friends all right at this hotel."

She started a little, but smiled beamingly.

"Oh, I'm quite rested, thank you—you found my telegram at your club?"

"Yes, and came at once. What can I do for you, Mrs. Hatch?"

"You've been doing so much for me for days past," she answered, lightly, "I daren't ask for more. Always thinking of me; always caring for me, a perfect stranger—a son couldn't have been kinder. I wish you were my son."

"That's pretty ambitious, isn't it, from a woman of your age to a man of mine?" he said, jokingly. "By the way, my father and mother have come down from their country home, and are in town for a purpose. I thought, if it would be agreeable to you, I'd like to bring my mother here to call."

A little flush came to her cheek as she again rested it among the lilies. "How kind you are!" she repeated. "How nice for your mother to own you! I never had a son. In my short married life I had a daughter, whom I lost twelve years ago. She was just five."

"And you have lost your husband since?" said young Adrian, gently. "Poor little woman, that was hard lines, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Hatch tried to answer. Her voice broke, and tears filled her eyes. While Adrian was wishing the conversation had not taken that particular turn, she recovered herself, and spoke brusquely, and to his utter confusion.

"Mr. Adrian, I sent for you to come here because I've been deceiving you."

Adrian started visibly, but controlled his feelings to answer her in his usual jocular tone.

"Don't say that. I've been thinking of you as almost my ideal woman."

"Almost, not quite," she answered. "The ideal is the girl you're engaged to marry."

"Who told you I'm engaged to marry?" he asked, reddening to the ears.

"As if you could hope to spend several days in solid talk with a clever woman and not have her find that your big, manly heart

was gone out of your keeping. Why, you foolish boy, I knew it the first day—then," she added, dropping her voice, "I was convinced when you never spoke of her to me, a mere traveling acquaintance."

"Granted, then, that I have that good fortune, and am very soon to be married," he said, hurrying; "will you give me your good wishes?"

"Yes! oh, yes—a thousand of them!" she exclaimed. "Happy boy, and happier girl, since she is sure of the husband of her choice! But I mustn't talk of that. I must go on telling you about myself."

"Must you?" he said, vaguely uneasy. "Why?"

"In the first place, because I'm awfully superstitious, and I'm afraid the object of my journey east will fail if I begin by letting you believe a lie."

"A lie! that's not a favorite word of mine, certainly," Adrian said, getting up, walking to the window and then returning to his place.

"You know I told you I am a widow coming to New York to visit my husband's family," she said, in a clear voice. "Well, that's false. I'm a waif, a social outcast. For twelve years not one of my husband's family has spoken to me. They wouldn't touch me with a pair of tongs."

Adrian recoiled. He could not believe it was his merry, debonair comrade of yesterday who was saying such hateful words to him.

"*He* is living and *he* got the divorce. You understand? *He* got the divorce. No, don't try to answer me. . . . I was a young, heedless, reckless, desperate girl, and I did what forced me to step down from my pinnacle in good society . . . to go out into darkness . . . never to see my child again."

Her voice broke in sobs. Through the open window came the rush and jar of the great city's everlasting movement. He was conscious of wanting awfully to get out into the open street again.

"I wish you hadn't sent for me," he said, finally. "I'd much rather have continued to think of you as I did."

"Oh, I know it," she answered, forlornly. "And my excuse for having misled you is miserably weak. I only wanted to get back for a little while into the place I've forfeited. I saw you respected me, and I liked the feeling. It was so jolly to be squired and waited on by a man of my own sort—above all, to be believed in."

"In what way can I serve you now?" he said, striving to let no change appear in his voice.

"Oh, in no way." He thought there was a tinge of recklessness in her tone. "I'm not going to sponge any longer on your gallantry. I'm quite sufficient for myself, thank you. For years I've been taking care of that individual, working hard and living honestly. . . . Mr. Adrian, it was the kindest thing you ever did to propose bringing you mother to call on me."

Adrian's ready blood rushed again to his

temples. He was literally oppressed for words to answer her.

"I only hope it'll be possible to find her disengaged, Mrs. Hatch," he stammered at last, because her eyes were fixed beseechingly on his.

She sprang to her feet, letting her bunch of lilies fall to the floor. Her voice sounded sharp as she cried out:

"That's not my real name! I'm not Mrs. Hatch, any more than you're Mr. Hatch! It's just a stupid, commonplace business name I took to work under. Oh! don't try to soothe me now; I can't help my quick temper, and I see what my honesty has done for me. It's the same old story. If you're going to condole with me, don't!"

She swept up the room stormily, breathing hard. Adrian did not dare to stir.

"You are quite unlike yourself," he ventured, in the end.

"You'd better go, Mr. Adrian," said the poor creature, stopping before him suddenly. "Now, while I'm hard and horrid! My

idyl's over. For a week I've been in my old place in life; now I've relapsed. Presently I'll be only a bubble, burst on the sea of your recollections. A month hence I'll have faded from your thoughts, and by next year, should you pass me in the street, you'll say, 'Where *have* I seen that woman?' So, you see, I'll not trouble you long. It's you that will trouble me."

"I swear I'd like to help you," cried the young man, fervently.

"You can't, my dear boy! you just can't!" she answered, touched by his evident sincerity. "No man can but one, and he's made of iron and india rubber. He's coming here presently."

She shivered.

"The man who—was your husband?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes; all this while he's let people think I'm dead. But he well knows I've been living alone, toiling to keep the wolf from the door! He's always had an eye—several eyes—on his lost treasure. He's never ceased

to spy on me—detectives—everything horrid; but I've never once asked him for help or anything. I have to now, for there's one I love better than my pride."

"Your child, too, is living?"

"Yes, with them—he's married again—and I'm just breaking my heart to see her! Think of me having to ask a favor of a man who has trampled me in the mire! Oh, but she's worth it. If he's flesh and blood he can't refuse me!"

"My dear lady," Adrian said, softly, when her tears were somewhat checked, "you must know this is very painful to me, the more so because I feel so disgustingly useless in the case."

"I told you you couldn't help!" exclaimed Marian. "Don't mind my crying. It eases the pain. Every mile of our journey the train was saying, 'You are this much—this much—nearer to your darling!' Oh! how foolish I am to struggle when I need so much strength for what's to come!"

She dried her eyes with a tiny web of

lace and linen, so ridiculously inadequate for its purpose that she crumpled it up into a ball, threw it across the room and laughed.

"Come, cheer me up a bit!" she cried. "Tell me about the girl that's to be your wife."

Now it was Adrian's turn to experience a sudden change of manner. A moment before he had been ready, at all hazards, to rush into the lists and champion this delightful victim of man's inhumanity. But when it came to bringing the name of his fiancée between them, he grew chill.

"What do you wish to hear?" he said, in a constrained voice.

"The usual things. Is she fair or dark, young or old, merry or sad, meek or spirited? I hope, for her sake, nature hasn't been so cruel as to make her impulsive, jealous, fiery on provocation, repenting as soon as she has offended, a fond lover, a hot hater, keen for revenge, but ready to lie down in the dust and let herself be walked on by one she loves! That's myself, Mr. Adrian—the worst kind

of an outfit for a wife. Better be cold, callous, self-worshiping, wearing an armor, never out of temper, never ruffled by a man's passions or emotions; pursuing the even tenor of an utterly selfish way, no matter who else goes under in the crash of life. That's my successor. *She* gets on splendidly!"

"I think you are right," said Adrian, rising. "It doesn't make you happier to see anyone just now. I'd better say good-by."

"Oh, don't mind my being a little catty about—that one," said Marian, nodding mysteriously. "But I won't do it any more. You were going to tell me about your bride-to-be."

"There's really nothing to tell," said the young man, still upon his feet to go, "but that she is very young, gentle, childlike, lovely to look upon, and entirely without experience in the world."

"I was all that—even lovely to look upon, they said—when I married at seventeen. Think of what, in other hands, I might now have been! Oh! I see you are afraid to

have me go on. Men so hate a woman who makes scenes. Good-by, then, but before we part——"

She paused, looking at him with a gaze all gentleness and pathos.

"What, Mrs. Hatch?" asked Adrian, very softly.

Marian hung her proudly set little head.

"Say you'll try to forget there's one doorway in my past with a black veil hanging over it! Say you believe I'm not altogether bad!"

Adrian clasped her hand.

"If ever you need me, send. I'll come at a minute's notice. You'll see then, Mrs. Hatch, whether I misjudge you."

"Thank you, thank you!" she cried. "Please continue to be as happy as you are good. Oh! why aren't all men like you! Your wife will never be tempted——"

At once he stiffened; the smile died out.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Hatch," he said, interrupting her.

"I see," she answered, sadly, "I mustn't

cross the gulf between me and her. But you can't help my praying for her when I do for you. Now go—please go."

She pushed him toward the door in her ever impulsive fashion, then dropped into her chair by the table. Adrian went slowly, torn by conflicting feelings, not in the least satisfied with himself. As he laid his hand on the knob he looked back. She was sitting like a breathing statue, her head drooped, her hands crossed on her lap.

"Good-by, and take courage," he said; then hurried out.

For a long time she did not move; then she uttered a deep sigh, and looking at a little traveling clock on the table, sprang suddenly into action.

"Dick won't come. Nothing can make him weaken!" she cried out, and began pacing the floor in feverish anxiety. There was another knock, and almost at a bound she reached the door and opened it.

A man of middle age entered, neatly attired in business clothes, of an exterior so

precise and formal that the first glimpse of him acted like a shower-bath on her nerves. He came in carefully, shutting the door behind him, and not offering her his hand.

"Mrs. Lorimer," he said—"or, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hatch—you may have forgotten me. I am Mr. Cleave, Mr. Lorimer's lawyer."

"I haven't forgotten you, Mr. Cleave," she responded, in clear, cutting tones. "It's hardly likely—you got him his divorce. Isn't he coming?"

"He is undecided," answered the lawyer, seating himself on the edge of a small upright chair. "I was to have a few preliminary words with you. Of course, madam, you must know that your letter, announcing your intended arrival in New York, was a considerable shock to my client. On my own part, I can assure you that I believed you to be—dead."

"Very sorry to disappoint you," she said, curtly and with a little curl of the lip.

"Mrs.—er—Hatch, I had better be frank

with you," went on Mr. Cleave, not in the least susceptible to curls of any sort. "And there is nothing gained by long preamble. My client at first declined, on any terms, to see you or hold speech with you. Your request seemed to him in the highest degree presumptuous. But, after consideration, he agrees to do so, on the absolute conditions that the meeting shall be in my presence and that there shall be no nervous excitement, no recrimination, no scenes."

"I never wanted anything less in my life than a scene with him!" she exclaimed.

"My client was never a man to avoid fulfilling the duty of——"

"Being disagreeable to someone down in the world. Exactly," she interrupted. "There, Mr. Cleave, don't trouble yourself with extolling Dick Lorimer to me. I will tell you frankly that, although you were the instrument of Fate to me, I don't bear you a personal grudge. I know you to be a severe man, but I believe you are a fair one. If ever you've felt a moment's compunction

for your share in turning a poor, friendless girl of two-and-twenty adrift on the dark river of men's and women's mercy, listen to me now. I want nothing on earth from you but a moment's belief in me. You have nothing to lose but a little of that hard crust with which the world and the habit of the law have surrounded you. Believe in me, Mr. Cleave; it won't harm you when you stand up to be judged. Believe in me, for, though I was bad and reckless, I always told the truth."

Mr. Cleave pursed his lips together till the line of them described a half-circle; he hemmed several times, and tried not to look her full in the face. At last, speaking to the steam radiator, he said, in a judicial voice:

"Proceed, if you please, Mrs. Hatch."

Marian, who was by now keyed to despairing eagerness, hurried on:

"You remember, on the trial, even you never accused me of not having loved my husband. I loved him—too well; when I

found his fancy had wavered away from me, to settle on the person who is now his wife, I was mad with jealousy. I did everything I knew to win him back, but my day was over. My little arts wearied him. If I was coquettish, he was cold as a stone. If I expostulated, he was bored. If I cried and raved, he swore at me and went to the club."

"That was a long time since, dear madam," interposed Mr. Cleave, impersonally, "a long time since."

"Oh, I know, but once is forever to a woman who loves. But hear the rest of it—a plain story from one who has never forgotten a single incident of that time, Mr. Cleave. The day Dick Lorimer brought that woman into our house, and forced me to receive her, I was crazy for revenge. I did the wildest act of folly a woman can commit. That man—my husband's best friend—who had been trying to make love to me for months, and I laughing at him, but, all the same, playing with fire, asked me to punish Dick

by going away with him. I was not twenty-three, remember, and still in love with Dick. . . . I felt myself spurned, humiliated, by my husband. . . . I cared for nothing else. . . ."

She did not sob, but stopped for a few moments, holding herself sternly in check, a proceeding that caused Mr. Cleave to survey the radiator with almost friendly regard. Presently she resumed:

"I am putting it in the fewest, baldest words. You know what followed. . . . I agreed to go away with that man. . . . I let him make all the arrangements. . . . I met him at a certain train. . . . You know it all, I say. God knows you made enough of it in those clever speeches before the referee. . . ."

"Well, madam?" said the lawyer, after another pause.

"I want to get you to say, now, that you believe I did all that for the sole purpose of paying Dick back in his own coin. What you tried to show was that I was wicked by

nature, and unfit to be guardian of my child. Ah, Mr. Cleave, you were very eloquent!"

"My good lady, I must protest!" began Cleave, forsaking the radiator to gaze at a table leg. He continued slowly: "I acted upon my best knowledge, in the best interests of my client and his child, and the decision of the referee was entirely fair and unbiased."

"Yes, I know; but when I think what other women are, who still hold their heads high and are surrounded by their families, I feel that no one gave me half a chance. That letter I wrote—that fatal fool of a letter, by which I hoped to touch Dick's heart and shame him to repentance—that sealed my fate! You remember it, Mr. Cleave—you read it aloud in court! Now, look here." She ran across to a trunk, opened it, took out a parcel of letters and held them up to him.

"All these, begging and praying to be forgiven for one single act of madness; swearing that I was living alone, and in bitter

grief and penitence. . . . See, Mr. Cleave! . . . Just listen to this one, please!"

Mr. Cleave was startled from his calm.

"Mrs. Lorimer—Mrs. Hatch, I mean—I must decline," he protested.

"Very well, then. Here's another—the same thing—another—all beseeching Dick, for our child's sake, to forgive me and take me back. Everyone he returned to me unopened, excepting that first one that you read aloud. Ah! how terrible it sounded in your voice!"

She threw the letters back into the trunk tray, shut the lid, and came back to him, wiping her eyes.

"I regret what you tell me, Mrs. Hatch. It is a new chapter in the case, certainly; very distressing, indeed, but I fail to see what can be gained by reverting to it now," the lawyer said.

"I only wanted to melt your heart a little," Marian cried, "in order to help me to melt Dick's."

Her face, her attitude, the tones of her voice, evinced her sincerity and sorrow. Cleave answered her almost with animation:

"Upon my soul, I believe you loved Lorimer only!"

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Cleave. I did love him, but it took one of those Sphinx women to hold him—one of the kind who know how to repress men, and act with them as cats do with their prey. Like the wife he's got now! While I—you could always see my heart in my face. I loved him, and I showed it. It wearied him—Oh! had I known better——"

"Time passes, Mrs. Hatch. What, specifically, did you desire me to do for you?" interposed the caller.

"Bring Dick here. Let me ask one single favor of him."

"H'm! 'Scenes,' you know. And my client was so exact on this point. I am afraid I can hardly trust you."

"Oh, yes, you can—you can! I won't raise my voice, won't say one unpleasant thing. Only try me, Mr. Cleave!"

She was so desperately anxious, so beautiful in her pleading, so much the wayward girl of old, Mr. Cleave could not refuse her. He walked, with short, mincing steps, over to the electric bell, and stood with his finger on the button.

"It will be awkward for me if I send for him, and you——"

"No 'ifs'—I promise," cried Marian.

Mr. Cleave rang.

"Thank you, dear Mr. Cleave," she said, softly. "This makes up for lots of harm you've done me. You can sleep better after this for thinking there's one poor little woman the less in the world to cherish you as her enemy."

"I recognize some of the old Eve in you, Mrs. Lor—er—Hatch," said the lawyer, grimly smiling. "Yours is certainly not a personality one easily forgets."

"Nor one that changes," she said, sighing.

When the bell was answered Mr. Cleave gave directions that a gentleman called Mr. Lorimer, then waiting below in the reception-room of the hotel, should be shown up to No. 1089. In the little time that elapsed before the new arrival the lawyer addressed himself to the examination of a note-book taken from his pocket, on the pages of which were inscribed certain cabalistic hieroglyphics that seemed to exercise his legal mind, but were in reality the very harmless address of a new bootmaker, given to him by a man at his club, and the recipe for a fish sauce, communicated by a gastronomic friend.

When Mr. Lorimer entered the room and Marian saw again in the full light of day the man who had received the homage of her young heart so many years before, she experienced a sort of revulsion at her own blind infatuation for an object so unworthy. Time and self-indulgence, prosperity and a material habit of looking at things had rubbed off all the fine edges from his once

striking manly beauty. The flesh beneath his eyes had a puffy, purple look; the eyes themselves were lifeless, the mouth had settled into hard and pleasure-loving curves. The fulness beneath his chin told the tale of middle life, as did the outline of his formerly athletic figure.

Slain at a glance was Marian's long-cherished sentiment for the husband of her youth. Although he fixed on her a first glance of some surprise at her abiding grace and freshness, the expression soon settled into one of rancorous resentment at her intrusion into his life.

With the feminine instinct of hospitality that nothing quells, Marian invited him to a chair; but without acknowledgment of her courtesy, he addressed her while still standing near the door.

"Tell me at once why you presumed to commit the impertinence of asking me to call on you."

Marian, who had unconsciously caught up Adrian's bunch of lilies, and stood

with them in her hand, answered, deliberately:

"Because I have heard that my daughter is to be married."

## II

"YOU mean that *my* daughter is to be married," Lorimer said, with cutting emphasis. "How does that concern you?"

"I read in a paper I picked up in San Francisco," she answered, with a proud, weary look, "some passing allusion to the approaching marriage of the beautiful Miss Gladys Lorimer, of New York, daughter of the eminent and wealthy financier. Nothing more. Of course, I did my best to find out further particulars. The people I knew were not of a kind to be informed on such points."

"Hardly," said Lorimer, with a sneer.

"I did not even see the bridegroom's name. You think I have no right to know it, or to care. But I do care—awfully! All these long, empty years I've lived on the thought of Gladys. Her childhood and her girlhood have been the playground of

my starved fancy. On every one of her birthdays I've bought a little pot of flowers and watered it with my tears. At Christmas I've wandered in the streets, looking through other people's windows trying to catch glimpses of young girls, wondering if she looked like them. When I met those of her age and station out walking or driving I stared at them hungrily. I envied their mothers and their maids. I'd have given a year of my life to dress Gladys for her first ball."

"Is this maudlin stuff what you brought us here to listen to?" asked Lorimer, with a shrug.

Marian showed no resentment. Her face had flushed, her eyes had a far-off, dreamy look.

"Isn't she very young to be married, Richard?" she said, in tenderest accents.

"You forget yourself, Mrs. Hatch!" the man said, ruffling like an angry turkey till the very veins of his throat swelled with resentful vanity.

"So I did, Mr. Lorimer," she answered, lightly. "After all, *I* was married at her age. I remember my joy in my wedding presents was like a child's over new toys. We weren't rich then, and they seemed magnificent. . . . That brings me to asking if you will be so good—so very good—as to let me send your daughter this little token I've bought for her on her marriage?"

She had taken up the parcel recently arrived, and extended it beseechingly.

"On no account. What are you thinking of? Allow her to . . . a present from you! Why, she's no idea you're—Cleave, the woman's mad—stark mad!" blustered Lorimer, backing to get out of her reach.

She dropped the parcel on the table quickly.

"Mr. Cleave knows I am not mad," she said, with spirit, "and you should. If you can't understand the natural impulse of maternity——"

"That you forfeited, once and for all," he

interrupted, "by throwing yourself into the arms of that damned 'sympathizer,' who, luckily, is dead, though I fancy you've been consoled."

"Come, come, Mr. Lorimer," said Cleave, warmly, "this won't do! You know it won't do at all!"

"I don't mind him, Mr. Cleave!" cried Marian, passionately. "He knows how much truth is in his insults. He knows what my life's been since I *was* mad—driven so by his cruelty, neglect, and the wilful ignoring of every good impulse of my heart. Like my child, I was, when I married, motherless. There was no one to warn me of the fearful risk I ran. If I had known anything of life and men I might have been — safe — to-day. What wonder that I am desperately anxious about Gladys?"

"Don't presume to put yourself in the same category with Miss Lorimer, who, by the way, profits by the example and counsels of a most competent adviser."

For the first time Marian's self-control failed her. She started as if flicked by a whip, and the angry tears rushed into her eyes.

"In the person of your wife?" she said, cuttingly. "Thank you for recalling her to me. As I remember Mrs. Lorimer she was hardly a model for innocent youth—clever, certainly, at concealing compromising appearances—a little vulgar, a little pious, perfectly satisfied with the punishment allotted in this world to other sinners, so long as she herself was not found out."

Cleave, being human, smiled vaguely around the eyes at this, the muscles of his mouth remaining quite firm. Lorimer, too furious to notice him, searched vainly for a properly withering reply.

Marian's face had taken on a reckless look, and she hurried on:

"I seem like a ghost coming back and hovering over your two devoted, connubial heads, don't I? How often I used to say I meant to try that hovering and eavesdrop-

ping spirit business, if you survived me! Well, I've tried it, and I don't find it as funny as I thought."

"Incorrigible! The old cursed trifling!" exclaimed Lorimer, turning his back. "Cleave, this woman's hopeless! I leave you to deal with her."

Marian, running after him, placed her hand on his arm. There was something so childlike about her as she pleaded with him to forgive her rash speech, to listen to her yet a little while, that any other man than Lorimer would have insensibly yielded a point or two before her magnetism. But he preserved his harsh, unyielding exterior as he grudgingly inquired what she had further to say.

Marian trembled in every limb.

"It is such a little thing to you to grant what I've crossed the continent to ask," she said, with desperately imploring eyes. "Let me see my child—once, only once."

"Listen to that, Cleave!" said Lorimer, contemptuously. "After the years of work

we've had to suppress this woman in the child's memory——"

"She remembered me, then?" cried the mother, thrilling with joy.

"At first we had no end of bother with her. She was nervous, hysterical, always calling for you in her sleep, and talking of you to her nurses. But by the judicious management of her present mother all that nonsense has been squashed. My daughter is now a healthy and normal girl. She believes you to be dead, and, so far as I know, never thinks of you."

The iron entered into Marian's soul at this, and her head drooped forward pitifully.

"Does she know," she asked, faintly, "about—my—disgrace?"

"I fancy nobody has enlightened her," answered Lorimer. "Old Agnes, who was her nurse when you left, has had entire charge of her since, and is still her maid. The woman had my strictest orders to never mention you."

"Agnes!" exclaimed Mrs. Hatch, "old

Agnes! She was always old, I think, and dear and forgiving. A kind of moral feather-bed to throw one's self upon. Then she's had Gladys? Oh, I'm glad! I'm glad! Richard, for God's sake, don't refuse me! I don't ask to meet my darling face to face. Let me only look at her from a distance, feast my eyes on her features, and I'll go back as I came."

"It's too risky," said he, after a moment's thought.

"Dick, look at my life!" she pleaded. "Isn't it enough of a wreck to please even you? Think what you and Cleave did for me. Why, in this town, where I was born and belong to the best, there isn't a decent house I could walk into now—not one! It seems a dream that I once led my set in society here; a party wasn't a go without me. When Mrs. Dick Lorimer left a dance it was over, and the rest followed me out, like sheep, into the dawn, even watched me get into my carriage. Oh! I lived then——"

She raised her arms over her head, then

dropped them suddenly. "Richard, by the memory of that time, grant me one look, one little look, at Gladys! It can't hurt her, or you. Remember when you first lifted your baby from my side and kissed her, then me, and thanked me for her. You weren't all hard then—you had a husband's and a father's heart in your bosom, and warm blood in your veins. Bad I may be, but you can't ever forget that hour. Richard, have pity! Think how I've suffered, expiated my sin! Try to imagine the bitter loneliness of my solitary life since you turned me out. Have mercy on a poor, crushed woman! Let me see my child!"

While Cleave suddenly found his attention claimed by a gang of workmen relaying the asphalt in the street below, Lorimer spoke, in a gentler tone:

"What you ask is manifestly improper. Under no circumstances could you be admitted inside my house."

"Inside or out, I care not!" she went on, seeing her advantage. "Anywhere, so I

catch one glimpse of my child ; see her before she passes into the new life and away from me forever."

Lorimer walked over to Cleave by the window and conferred with him in whispers, with the result that the lawyer, wonderfully subdued in manner, left his client and came over to sit by the chair into which Marian had fallen, quivering with her own vehemence of passion.

" Mrs. Hatch," he said, with real feeling, " there are delicate questions involved in what you ask. The young gentleman your daughter is to marry will presently be placed in an embarrassing predicament. It will be soon necessary to inform him of the facts of her mother's past."

" He might have known them easily, if he had tried," she said, gloomily. " It was certainly no mystery ! The papers were full of it at the time."

" As a matter of fact, he comes from a distance," Cleave went on, smoothly, " and has chanced to hear nothing at all

about the divorce. He, like the rest of the world, believes you to have died long since."

Marian echoed him:

"Died long since! And so I did, God knows!"

"In these cases," pursued the lawyer, "nothing comes of reviving old sorrows and grievances. My client had already deputed me to inform his future son-in-law of the fact that Gladys's mother is living, though unlikely ever to make herself known to him and his wife. We shall ask him, in his own time and place, to tell his wife the truth. Would you wish to cloud your child's marriage by letting this sad news come to her *now?*"

"No, a thousand times no! You know it, Mr. Cleave!" exclaimed Marian.

"Then there is another circumstance that complicates the situation. The father and the mother of the bridegroom reside at some distance from New York. They are excellent, influential people of large wealth, and

are just now allied with Mr. Lorimer in very important business——"

"Dick's business! Then he has them in his net?" cried she, in irrepressible satire.

Mr. Cleave went on, patiently:

"Those worthy people are old-fashioned, narrow and conservative to eccentricity. Did they know of this matter, they would be quite capable of violent public opposition to the match, which would thus stir up around an innocent young girl a noisome scandal in the newspapers, and bring you small satisfaction in return."

"No, no, not that—never that!" she said.

"Tell her all, Cleave," said Lorimer, joining them. "She'll understand me better then. Tell her that the son is dependent on his parents for fortune, and that if she's lunatic enough to show up now, she'll not only disgrace her child, but impoverish her. Besides, those people will, like as not, whip their money out of a venture that means millions to my family. Why, curse her, she'd ruin all of us!"

"Now I fully understand you," she said, facing him contemptuously, then turning quickly away. "That's enough, Mr. Cleave —I'm conquered. I'll struggle no more. But before you go, tell me, please—not if my girl's lover is rich or well-placed—and I don't care a rap about his frumpy old parents and their millions—tell me if my child's husband will be good and true—patient with her faults, forbearing with her follies—if, in short, he is a gentleman."

"Miss Lorimer's choice is all that her friends could wish," the lawyer answered. "But, Mrs. Hatch, you did not let me finish what I began to say under instruction from my client. If he were quite assured that you would in no way betray your identity, he might consent to let you see Miss Lorimer at a distance. There would be the condition that you go away from town directly afterward, of course."

"See her! Oh, my God!" cried Marian. "Where? How?"

"Mrs. and Miss Lorimer are in the habit

of driving in the Park every fine afternoon about four. If you will go to-morrow to a spot that will be indicated by my client, you may be able to see the young lady pass in her carriage, without fear of her detecting you."

"But how shall I know my child?" she asked, anxiously.

"Mr. Lorimer will send old Agnes to join you, and point her out to you. You will this evening receive a note from me containing full particulars; but there must be this clear understanding, that this is all you will *ever* ask of us."

"I promise—anything!" she cried, joyously. "Just now I feel only seventeen myself. Calling for me in her sleep! My own—my treasure! Old Agnes coming for me! Dear old thing! She always loved me. Harm Gladys by thought or deed for my selfish pleasure? Oh, Mr. Cleave, I can't speak to Richard Lorimer! I don't want to lose the heavenly warmth his promise has put into my heart; but tell him, please, that I'll do all he asks."

Over her April face again swept a torrent of tenderness, making it so young, so radiant, that the two men who had come there to scorn her went out together in half-shamed silence.

Lorimer, indeed, had vaguely thought to offer Marian some pecuniary help, but on looking about him decided that her finances must be in a satisfactory condition, since she presented such a good front to the world.

## III

THE Park presented a pretty and unwonted spectacle all that long bright day of May. For a wonder, no boreal hint in the air brought bronchitis and pneumonia into the train of the various May queens who assumed their brief sovereignty in spots yielded by authority for the occasion. A soft wind rustled the young leaves of the trees and scattered the petals of forward blossoms on the velvet turf. Every boskage showed masses of tender color, but for once the flowers were outdone by their human rivals.

Since before noon May parties of children from the tenement districts all over town had been streaming out of trolley cars and overflowing into the various approaches of the Park. Numbers of them wore caps of red, white, and blue and carried American

flags, walking in prim processions, led by drum and fife, until they reached the bits of springy turf surrendered to them for the day. Then they relaxed into a very orgy of Spring happiness, running, tumbling, sliding, shouting, rolling and turning cart-wheels on the grass. Some of the bands were made up of children dressed in gala costumes of old-world fashion. Their faces revealed types of every nationality of Europe, the Slav predominating; an odd sight altogether under the forest of American liberty-caps. Other little urchins and damsels were in pathetically tattered finery, footing it and scampering with the best.

In a lovely nook near one of the main driveways stood a little summer-house, whose trellised sides and steep-pointed roof were fairly dripping with the purple bloom of wistaria. A shaded path in front divided it from the road, and on one side, in an intensely verdant meadow, stood a May-pole, the many-colored streamers of which were held by a party of children of the poor-

est class; circling round the dancers, instructing them in the art of weaving the ribbons about the pole, and generally policing the crowd, passed and repassed a half-dozen young men and girls, the active members of a club for benevolent work in this stratum of society. For those left over from the dance were organized games and distractions of every kind that the active brains of the managers could invent. One poor little fellow, in shoes a world too big for him, having gained possession of a painted balloon, had retired with it, in jealous rapture, to the shelter of a clump of pyrus japonica, and was giving the wonder rein above his head, following its upward course with fascinated gaze.

"Take care, Johnny-boy!" exclaimed one of the managers, a charming young woman in thin muslin, with a large picture-hat wreathed with nodding plumes, who observed him as she was darting by. "Hold very fast to your string. If it gets away from you, you're gone!"

But to Johnny-boy the present enterprise embodied all the sky-soaring romance of his six years of East-side existence in his mother's flat. His brown eyes grew bigger as his string was tolled out from his hot little dirty hand; smiles widened his small thin face; he felt akin to a bird winging its way into the azure.

A lady emerged at this moment from the screen of verdure dividing the playground from the roadway, and looked about anxiously to identify the spot. When she saw the summer-house and one or two other landmarks of which she was in search, her face grew brilliant with satisfaction; then, as quickly, tears came into her eyes. Johnny-boy, seeing this grand and pretty lady in tears, looked at her in astonishment. His glance aside was unfortunate, since his treasured balloon took immediate occasion to elude his grasp and speed away higher, driven by the breeze. His look of despair, seen only by the newcomer, caused her to drop on her knees beside him and put an arm around his shoulder.

"Don't cry, little man," she said, soothingly.

"It wuz my blune!" wailed Johnny; "the first I ever had!"

"But you can get another. My balloon went up long ago, and I couldn't," she said, slipping into his hand a silver piece that brought joy to his face.

"Say, this'll buy two blunes, an' I'll bring you one, lady," he observed, clattering off in pursuit of a vender.

The lady smiled, and her smile was reflected in the eyes of the pretty girl with the picture-hat, whom the sound of Johnny-boy's wailing had brought back to the spot.

"Thank you for relieving our little chap's trouble so promptly," said Miss Lina Thurston, secretary of the Little Wings Club, to the stranger, whom she at once recognized as of her own station. "I have done nothing for hours, it seems to me, but redress wrongs and soothe grievances. It's a little world in miniature, this May party of ours."

"You represent the Little Wings Club?"

"Yes, I'm its unworthy secretary. To-day we flatter ourselves we are a distinct success. No little boy has as yet broken or sprained any part of his anatomy, there have been only three fights, and no little girl has insisted on going home."

"From what do you derive your name, if I may ask?"

"A fancy of one of our vice-presidents, Miss Gladys Lorimer——"

"Ah!" said the strange lady, with a sudden indrawing of the breath.

"I beg your pardon; are you ill?" asked Miss Thurston, kindly. "Wouldn't you like to go and sit a while in that little summer-house, and look on at our fun?"

"It's nothing but the first heat of Summer. You were going on to tell me more about your club and its vice-president."

"She selected for our motto the lines:

> Little things on little wings
> Bear little souls to heaven.

Rather nice, isn't it? You know our association is called a fashionable fad, but——"

"And Miss Lorimer is fond of charitable work? Is she strong enough to do it—does she run no risks in the quarters of the town where these children live?"

"You know her, then?" began Lina, when a small girl coming toward her engaged her attention.

"Miss Thurston, Tommy's pinched me, and took away my orange."

"Coming, Katy! Duty calls, so I must run away. If you stop awhile you'll see them crown the queen," she added, with a friendly nod of adieu.

Marian, left again alone, looked about her nervously.

"It is almost time for Agnes," she thought, trying to still her beating heart by pressing her gloved hand over it.

A young man, very pleasant of face and near-sighted, came out of a thicket of shrubbery and stopped before her, taking off his hat.

"I beg pardon, but are you one of the

committee?" he said, in rather a helpless tone.

"No; but can I be of use?" answered Mrs. Hatch.

"Thanks, ever so much. There's a little Roumanian girl over there sitting glued to the ground, howling dreadfully, and won't tell what's the matter. What on earth shall I do with her?"

Miss Thurston, executing one of her swallow dips about the crowd, here returned to the relief.

"Stay by her, Fred, and comfort her. It's your duty as first vice-president," she exclaimed, mischievously.

"Oh, I say," answered Fred, visibly exhilarated by her presence. "I can do it fast enough if you keep me company."

"I can't, possibly," said she; "I'm 'it' in kiss-in-the-ring. Perhaps you'll change places with me, though."

"No, thanks," he answered, returning manfully to his post. An organ-grinder just then appearing with a monkey created

the usual diversion, and in the general sortie of the forces to surround him, Marian was again left to her own devices.

"I am running too great a risk," she thought, ruefully. "If they knew what I am I'd be the hawk in the dovecote. But oh, what it means to me to hear my darling's name spoken familiarly among them!" She looked at her watch. "Three minutes past the hour, and Agnes hasn't come! Oh, if she should fail me!"

The next turn in her walk to and fro revealed hurrying toward her through the crowd a plain, thick-set old woman with a shrewd, benevolent face and the manner of a privileged upper servant who is also confidante of the family. Marian schooled herself to resist the desperate impulse to throw both arms around her, and contented herself with a long and fervent kiss.

"Oh, Agnes, Agnes, Agnes!" she repeated, yearningly. "How long since I've seen your dear old face! I'd like to let all the world know what a duck you are!"

"My poor dear, my poor dear, quiet yourself. Come in the summer-house and sit down. There'll be an officer stepping up by-and-by to see what ails the pair of us. There! there! Let me look at ye, my beauty. Not much changed—for the better, if anything—in looks."

"Agnes, is she coming?" demanded Marian, as soon as they were in the seclusion of the green-walled kiosk.

"By-and-by, Mrs. Lorimer, my dear. Ye have a wild look in your eyes; ye must control yourself."

"There, I'm controlled," said Marian, choking down her emotion. "I feel as if I could throw myself like a tired child into your arms, and cry my heart out. It's been so long, Agnes! I've been so lonesome!"

"My lamb, I've never forgot ye. But that I had your child to look after, I'd have pulled up stakes and followed ye to California."

"She needed you more than I did. I'm thankful she had you," cried Marian, squeez-

ing the time-hardened hand under the neat brown glove. "But begin, and don't stop. Tell me everything about her from the time I left her until now."

"No, my dear, I can't," said Agnes, mournfully. "He wouldn't let me come to-day without a solemn promise I wouldn't talk about the child. I wasn't so much as to answer a question about her."

"Cruel! cruel!" cried Marian. "This is more than I deserve."

"Don't give up, dear. Think! ye're going to see her in a minute! That'll comfort ye a little, won't it? While we're waiting tell me about yerself. Ye've found friends?"

"None of my own sort," she said, sadly.

"Ye haven't wanted for anything?"

"You remember my old knack at making lampshades and painting fans? Well, I started a little business, in time opened a place of my own; my ideas 'took,' and I've prospered fairly well. I had laid up quite a little capital, and the thing was growing in my hands. Two weeks ago, when I read

about Gladys going to be married, the terrible longing to see her overcame me. I sold out my business to my forewoman, took all I had, bought some good clothes and started East."

"Heedless as ever, bless her heart!" said Agnes, surveying her companion's costume and person admiringly. "Always had the touch with everything she put on! The present madam isn't a patch on ye for style. But after ye've seen her, your child—mum's the word, but sure I can say that—what are ye going to do? How in the world, poor bird, are ye going to live?"

"God knows!" Marian answered, drearily.

"Where?" pursued the old woman, anxiously.

Marian did not speak, but made a vague gesture outward with her hands.

"I'm afraid ye've done another mad thing, my dear, to give up a good support. The world isn't ever in a hurry to help women to help themselves."

"When was I ever prudent?" cried Mrs.

Hatch. "Didn't money always slip through my fingers like water through a sieve? But I don't care for anything now except what I came here for. Let me see my child just once, and I'll begin life all over again."

Agnes stroked her hand.

"Poor child! poor child!"

A flush of pleasure came into Marian's cheek.

"It is so sweet, so precious, to be pitied by a true heart," she said, gratefully. "At this moment I feel happier than in years."

The two sat silent for a little while, old Agnes hampered by the injunctions laid upon her, Marian in a dream of the past evoked by her companion's voice and touch. She was aroused from it by a little cry from Agnes.

"There! there! She's coming. Look, dear, that's Mrs. Lorimer's victoria."

Entirely sheltered from observation as she was, Marian could feast her eyes to her heart's content on the vision pointed out to her. On the rear seat of the approaching

carriage, with its shining Kentucky cobs, two trim men on the box and the Lorimer crest in silver everywhere, sat an older woman, on whom the mother's gaze wasted no time, and a fair, youthful creature, who absorbed her attention utterly. Tears rose to Marian's eyes and for a moment obscured her treasure. Dashing them away impatiently, she looked again, and thanked God when a block in the line of vehicles ahead kept the Lorimer victoria longer in her sight.

"That Gladys! That my nestling, whom I left asleep in her crib . . . so tall, so beautiful! . . . Ah, God! Agnes! She doesn't speak to the Sphinx woman any more than is needful. They aren't intimate, as mother and daughter should be. Gladys is absorbed on her own account. . . . Oh! I'm like a beggar staring at a feast. I envy that woman; envy her horribly. It might have been my victoria. How I should have gloried to be seen abroad with my angel! . . ."

"She's a fine, well-grown guyrl, and a

perfect lady, if I do say it," answered Agnes, complacently.

"These tears again! They must go. I must see her every second of the time allowed me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hatch, desperately shaking her head to rid herself of the fresh gathered mists before her vision. "Agnes, they're going! . . . Oh, God! she must not leave me unsatisfied. Agnes, the time's too short for the mother that gave her birth."

"They're only going to stop a little way ahead, and the child will get out to join her friends," said Agnes, passing a stout arm around the agonized creature. Her own old eyes could see nothing for their quick response to the mother's yearning.

While Marian sat in the arbor, paying in that brief space of time the bitter price of her misdoing as she had not done in all the years of her exile, Mrs. Lorimer's voice was uplifted in exhortation to Marian's child:

"Gladys, I have really no patience with

this club business of yours! I hesitate greatly to leave you among the rabble of children from the East-side. You'll get some disease, I'm certain, and this is no time for you to make experiments with your health."

"I promised them to come, mamma," answered the girl, gently; "but, of course, if you don't wish it, I won't stop."

"I should think your subscription was enough, and I would give something over. However, since I see Miss Thurston and Dolly Gay and Mrs. Brenton are there, I suppose you may venture for a little while. Only until I go around the drive, remember!"

The victoria had halted, and Gladys, under the superintendence of a natty groom, had set one slender foot on the asphalt. At sight of her, the children, evident adorers of their young vice-president, broke bounds and swarmed down to the driveway, followed by the young ladies who had them in charge. There was no holding back. Gladys was surrounded, captured, coaxed to

play wolf. A deafening clamor filled the air. All the passers-by smiled indulgently, for this was the children's day in Central Park.

As her conquerors carried the young girl off to the green slope from which their Maypole soared aloft, and Mrs. Lorimer, with many jingling chains, drove reluctantly away, Marian Hatch made a movement to run out of her hiding place, but was arrested by the reproving glance of her comrade.

"Mrs. Lorimer, my dear—for, God save us, I can't be calling ye by the name ye give yerself—think what ye're about."

"You're right, Agnes," she said, falling back on the bench. "Oh, she is coming back this way."

"Keep quiet, ma'am, and there'll be something to reward ye. I wasn't to mention names, but I'll leave ye to guess who it is my young lady has spied walking down that path that crosses below us. Who is it she'd run to meet like that, if not her future husband, bless her soul!"

Agnes, brimming with pride and importance, indicated by a gesture the direction in which she desired Marian to look, and the latter, with eagerness and jealousy combined, turned to behold—Jack Adrian!

Jack Adrian, to whom her child fluttered like a homing pigeon—Jack Adrian, between whom and herself she had voluntarily opened the gulf of separation!

How could she have dreamed that this comrade of her later days, this man whose honest belief in her had been like a spring in the desert of her life, this fond lover, who had yet made her feel the bitter sense of her unfitness to be spoken to about his betrothed, was the master of Gladys's destiny?

As she stood staring at the two with startled eyes, they remained for a moment so near her on the path below she could not but hear their talk, simple in phrasing, but freighted with the intonation of happy lovers.

"I was so afraid—" Gladys began.

"Afraid of what?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"Oh, that I shouldn't be let stop—and then that you wouldn't get here," she said, blushing under his gaze.

"I only came to say I couldn't come," he answered, laughing, "and to get this look at you to carry me on till evening."

"Foolish boy! All that long way uptown for me?"

"No, for the Club, if you like that better."

"Come, then, you must show yourself for a minute. Too bad! There's mamma in the victoria, coming back."

"Soon there'll be no mamma to come between us," he said, smiling. "I'll chaperon you, and you'll chaperon Dolly and Lina, you see."

"That will be such fun! But, really, Jack, I'm ashamed of speaking so about Mrs. Lorimer. She has done her best for me, I'm sure."

"But her best is oppressive, as we know."

"If she were my own, my very own mother, I shouldn't feel so," the girl said, with a sigh. They had started to walk back to rejoin the little group around the Maypole, and, in passing, Gladys's voice came to her mother's ear so distinctly that the listening woman involuntarily stretched out her arms in answer.

But the voices passed, receded, and directly afterward she saw Mrs. Lorimer drive up, reclaim her companion, greet Adrian with effusive graciousness as he put Gladys into her place, and sit waving exaggerated farewells to the rest of the club committee assembled on the knoll above. Whatever might be the measure of regard cherished by Gladys's friends for her stepmother, they omitted none of the forms of respectful salutation in her direction. The stir of rebellion against this condition of affairs made Marian sick and cold. The horrible difference between the lots of the two women —one of whom had sinned and accepted the consequence, the other, having sinned

equally, yet successfully hidden her secret —smote her poignantly. For a moment her sense of the injustice of Fate obscured even her feeling for her child.

But when the footman sprang up beside the coachman, and the victoria with the Lorimer crest and liveries was under way; while Jack Adrian stood, hat in hand, smiling at Gladys, who looked back at him with the innocent, happy expression of a young child that has gained its heart's desire—then a realization of what she was losing came to Marian.

"My child! my child! my child!" was all she could say. But the look in her face alarmed Agnes more than anything that had gone before. It was plain that the poor woman was tried beyond endurance and hardly responsible for anything she might do. She suddenly ran out of the summer-house, Agnes clutching her and pleading with her to remain until under self-control.

"Agnes, you don't understand," she ex-

claimed. "It's the last time I shall see her! I have looked my last upon my child! Would you not pity any mother who was turning away from her child's grave?"

The nurse, seeing her thus half-distraught, clasped her hands, praying for the interposition of Christ and Mary to save the poor soul from some desperate act. And just then, straight along the path into which Marian had strayed, came Adrian, hurrying back to his day's work, in which the meeting with Gladys had been a sunny episode.

As Mrs. Hatch beheld him the full meaning of their relative positions flashed through her mind, arousing the desire to shelter Gladys at all hazards by concealing their relationship.

"I have been mad; now I am sane," she said, marshaling her nerve-forces to guide her in the inevitable meeting. Adrian, when he saw Mrs. Hatch standing there before him, holding out her hand as she would have done at any time during their recent friendly companionship, was not glad of the

encounter. She came too suddenly into the arena of thoughts fully filled with his love and eager anticipations of soon having Gladys to himself. Since they had parted, the day before, he had reverted to her more than once, with mingled feelings. If, when they had arrived together in New York, anyone authorized to do so had asked him who, critically speaking, was the most fascinating woman he had ever met, he would have answered, Mrs. Hatch. She had piqued, entertained, charmed him during the days of their enforced companionship on the Pullman car. But there had been no disloyalty to Gladys in that admiration. He had always kept this dear little guileless love of his in a walled garden in his thoughts.

Marian's sad story, her impulsive confidence, the glimpse she had given him of her hapless life, had, as we have seen, excited his loyal sympathy. But after he had gone out of her impelling presence, the natural revulsion had come. He wanted no more of a woman whose history was inscribed upon

such a scroll. At present, all his ideas were tinged with rose color, his hopes and manly ambitions fixed on home and hearthside, wife and children, the sanctity of the marriage tie. He wanted nothing in common with one who had, whatever her temptation, in her own case deliberately dragged in the dust the fair fabric of marital honor. The more he reflected on such as Gladys, the more repellent seemed such as Mrs. Hatch. If ever he should meet the poor woman again, he would not stay his hand from doing her a service; but just now he did not want her in Gladys's kingdom—emphatically not!

He lifted his hat, and spoke to her pleasantly, forcing himself to pause for a moment and express the hope that she was feeling better than yesterday and enjoying the open air, adding his wish that she might have had good news.

"Yes, I have had good news—of a sort," she said, smiling, under her veil, so that he felt quite relieved regarding her.

"My best congratulations," he said, hur-

riedly; "and you won't mind my leaving you in rather a hasty fashion? The truth is, I have no right to be here now. A business appointment of some importance awaits me at my office."

"Don't let me keep you. Good-by," she said, brightly, and again their hands met and parted.

For days Marian had been feeding on his comradeship. Their exchange of ideas had been intimate and continued. She had recognized her power over him, and rejoiced in it in true womanly fashion. Now that power had vanished utterly. She herself had destroyed it. Her quick intuition read in his mind relief to be rid of her.

And worst of all, he was to be the husband of her child. But she had not betrayed herself! Thank heaven for that!

Old Agnes, coming up to her, did not hide her surprise at what she had witnessed.

"My dear, I am that taken aback—who'd have thought ye knew my young lady's

sweetheart!" she said, wonder puckering her face.

"I know him, but he does not suppose that I ever laid eyes on Gladys," Marian hastened to explain.

"And ye're satisfied with her choice? He's rich and a grand family, too, they say, and a high education, and a bonny lad to look at, don't ye think?"

"Yes, Agnes. I think so. Gladys is luckier than ever her mother was, for he is all you have said, and . . . good. He'll never let harm come near her."

"Mrs. Lorimer, my dear, ye are getting white. Come back into the summer-house and sit down and use my salts."

"Don't call me that! Call me Mrs. Hatch. It's all I've a right to. Oh, Agnes, my heart is breaking!"

"That's right, cry it out, my dearie. I'm only allowed an hour with ye, but I do hate to go and leave ye. There's a bit of time yet."

"Agnes, don't forsake me! I feel as if I

were on a wreck, and you, in the last life-boat, leaving it without me."

"My lamb! my poor, sorrowing lamb!" muttered the old woman, drying her eyes.

Marian seized her arm and said fiercely in her ear:

"Agnes, if I die for it, I must see her nearer."

"What can I do, dearie? Ye told the lawyer if ye saw her once 'twould do ye."

"What do lawyers know about a mother's heart?" she cried. "I said so, and I meant it; but this glimpse of her has aroused within me a passion of longing to be close to her, to speak to her, no matter how or where. Just think of all the years I missed—all those baby years of her precious life! I can't get them back. No matter what I do, I can't get them back. It always drove me crazy when I sat working—the thought of what I was missing! I love children with their little nestling hands and trustful touches, . . . and I left my own to strangers! Agnes, you know what I must be feeling. She's

mine, mine! spite of all, she's mine! God gave her to me. We oughtn't to be separated, any more than flesh from blood. Oh! I could fight like a tigress to hold her one moment in my arms."

While she paused, drawing long breaths of pain, the children away over by the Maypole began to sing.

"Listen to them. They do that to mock me, Agnes," she exclaimed.

"There, there," began Agnes, patting her hand soothingly; and insensibly Marian's heart opened to the comfort of her touch. When she could speak more coherently she faced the old nurse with imploring eyes.

"Help me, Agnes. If you want to die happy think of some way in which I can get near my child—touch her dress, even. When she goes to her husband my last chance will be gone. He won't give *me* an opportunity to meet *her*, even though he doesn't know my claim on her. You are my one hope. Think, invent some way to get me inside that house."

Agnes sat up, alarmed.

"Inside that house, dearie? It's not to be thought of."

"I want to see her amid her bridal preparations, to carry away some little pictures of her innocent maidenhood, to photograph her on my memory before she becomes a wife and mother, when I shall never dare intrude on her again. Oh, Agnes! it's as if I stood stretching out my hands to you to keep me from falling into a pit."

"How can I, child? It's as much as my place is worth; but I don't mind that. When *she* goes, the light of that house is snuffed out, sure."

"Couldn't I come there carrying something that's expected for the wedding?" cried Marian, her fancy leaping over all dangers and difficulties.

"Ye were always such a one for ideas, an' no fear in your body," said the nurse, irresolute, sorely tempted, yet following Marian's lead, as had always everyone who came within the sphere of her influence.

"Think, Agnes; think!"

"There's the wedding gown to come home to-morrow from Madame Collette's. There's nothing to prevent me fetching it away in a cab. The madame knows me well, and that I've waited on my young lady there at all her fittings. Then, if I had ye in the cab—but oh, no, child! what am I dreamin' of!"

"Who's afraid, Agnes?" exclaimed her fellow-conspirator, joyfully "It strikes me that's a perfectly feasible idea. I wait in the cab at Collette's till you come out with the box; we drive to Mr. Lorimer's house; you go in at the basement door, while I present myself boldly at the front door, with the box, as a woman from the dressmaker. What could be plainer sailing? You wash your hands of me, and leave me to do the rest."

"No, no, dearie; it won't do," declared Agnes, in a discouraged tone, "The risk's too great."

"There are none of my old servants there except yourself?"

"No, ma'am, not one. The master took

good care of that. There ain't one of these we have now ever heard of the first Mrs. Lorimer. But if ye met *him* or *her!* Just think of it!"

"Agnes, I take the risk, I tell you," exclaimed Marian, her voice sharp with eagerness.

There was another long pause, filled in by the sound of the children's singing.

"Well, Agnes?" Marian said at last.

"I can't, I tell ye. I don't *dare!*" said the woman, stubbornly.

Marian drew back with a quick, despairing gesture. "Then I'll end my bother some other way," she said, in a somber whisper.

"My dear, my dear, whatever are ye hinting at?" cried the alarmed nurse.

"It would really be the best way," answered Mrs. Hatch, gaining composure as she went on. "Often and often I've thought of it, but I wanted to live till I'd seen her. Now that I've seen her, for God's sake tell me what you think I've got to hang on for? Listen, Agnes. I've been

conscious lately, more than once, of a pain like an iron band across my heart. I saw a doctor in San Francisco, and he tried to dress his verdict in soothing words, but I know what's here." She held her hand against her side. "A sudden joy, a sudden sorrow, . . . and I may go. No pain particularly, I believe—so it's worth waiting for. But life's been so hard on me, Agnes, so unusually inclined to pull me up by the check-rein at every turn, that, a little time ago I formed the habit of carrying around with me something of which it would be convenient and simple for me to be supposed to have taken an overdose, . . . after making arrangements for a decent ending and a paragraph in the newspapers that will not compromise anybody."

"Mrs. Lorimer, ye'd never mean it!"

"Yes, Agnes; and what is more, I'll do it now if you refuse me the last desperate chance I have to see my child again. You know I generally keep my word."

"Oh! ye poor thing, don't ye see my

heart's bleeding for ye?" cried Agnes. "It ain't threats, however dreadful, as would drive me against my duty. It's pity for ye that's choking me. I just feel, if ye went away and never saw her more, that I couldn't sleep o' nights. If I could only be sure of ye controlling yourself——"

"Try me," said Marian.

"Ye know 'twould be awful if he found us out. That wouldn't move ye a mite, but if 'twas known on the poor child——"

"Don't you feel that she's what would keep me acting my part to the bitter end?" pleaded the mother.

"I never was so put about in all my born days—never, never!" cried Agnes.

A gleam of old-time mirth flashed into Marian's eyes—always it had been Agnes's habit to sound a last protest in these words before yielding to demands on her in the nursery.

"The saints forgive me if I'm sinnin' to save a poor mother's heart from breakin'!"

added the old woman, tears raining down her cheeks.

Marian's face became radiant. In the reaction from despair to respite, her nature, all extremes, sprang up the gamut of hope as though she had never known a rebuff of fate. Youth came back to her starry eyes, bloomed on her cheeks, laughed on her vivid lips. As the nurse, almost terrified by the sudden change, looked at her, beseeching her to go no further, Mrs. Hatch sprang to her feet and clapped her hands in joy.

At that moment a little band of children, shut out by numbers from the Maypole ring on the slope above, and including Johnny-boy, came scampering down to find a level place for a dance on their own account. Wild with hysterical delight, Marian darted out to direct their revels, and finally, amid their screams of pleasure, joined hands in their circle, dancing gaily and gracefully till they were out of breath.

## IV

JACK ADRIAN sat in the morning-room of his future father-in-law's house, in close conversation with that astute gentleman, who, for purposes of his own, had preferred to give their talk an air of intimacy and domesticity by selecting for it this familiar place rather than the formal precincts of the library. Here, during their engagement, the lovers had been wont to retreat from fear of interruption below stairs; here breathed a thousand softening voices of their past. But in spite of Mr. Lorimer's plans, the young man's face wore no mild or placable expression. His brow was knit, his head was bowed on his hand, he bore every appearance of one who has just received an appreciable shock. Lorimer, on his side, was visibly nervous and full of an anxiety he masked as best he might. He sat in an

armchair, twisting a paper-cutter made of carved ivory, until it snapped and was tossed away impatiently.

The room was one of those luxuriously fitted quarters of a modern establishment, where, at odd moments, the family is wont to rendezvous and the ladies sit note-writing, gossiping, and toying with Penelope webs of needle-work. A deep bay window in the front, through whose liberal panes were revealed glimpses of the Park across the Avenue, was so screened and latticed with growing vines and big-leaved plants as to form a bowery retreat.

Couches and fauteuils of old-rose velvet, cushioned abundantly, were arranged to hold their sitters prisoner, since at the elbows stood little tables with electric reading-lamps, laden with the newest books and periodicals.

A large table in the center bore writing implements of silver, candle-sticks, paper-cases, book-racks and framed photographs without end, with tall silver and crystal

vases containing red roses and white lilac. Low bookcases ran around walls hung with greenish brocaded stuff and adorned with water-colors and choice etchings and engravings.

To Jack the whole of the large, bright, joyous-looking room was so eloquent of his lady-love he could not bear now to look around him, carrying the new thoughts of her recently imparted to his mind. The voice of Mr. Lorimer grated on him as it had never done before, when after a brief silence he again began to speak:

"And there, my dear Jack, is my version of the story Cleave broached to you last night; an unpleasant one, I grant, for a man to hear on the eve of his marriage, but—" he shrugged elaborately—"what would you have? Everybody nowadays has some sort of a shilling shocker in his family. Suppose the closet doors of most people we know were to suddenly spring open and the hidden skeletons pop out! By Jove, we'd have a grisly time of it! Imagine them meeting

on common ground for a witches' Sabbath! The unmentionable wife or sister or daughter joining hands with the son or husband or brother who's forty fathom deep with an ugly scandal tied to his neck, like a stone to a drowned dog! Come, cheer up, old chap! This'll never make any difference to you. The woman's bound to keep dark. She hasn't a ghost of a show among people who used to know her. Besides, she's been mum so long there's nothing to fear from her now."

"Not while Gladys remained with you, perhaps; but the change of estate may be a temptation. However, that's not the only thing. It's that I can't bear to associate the thought of such a loathsome thing with Gladys—with my wife."

"There spoke the son of your Puritan forebears," said Lorimer, with a short laugh. "It won't do—wearing that buff jerkin in a society like ours. Put it off, my lad—put it off! But this much I can assure you—the child you're marrying inherits little from her mother. She is gentle, loving, well-

balanced, self-controlled, as straight as a string and as clean as a whistle. If it had been my luck to get one of that kind in my first venture, I'd not have had this cursed story to tell you now."

"Mr. Lorimer—pardon me," said Adrian, in his intense fashion; "did you give that unfortunate woman the benefit of every doubt?"

"Didn't I tell you I have her letter owning up to the whole thing?" exclaimed Lorimer, irritably. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," was the intent of her ladylike experiment.

"I know. Mr. Cleave gave me a copy of it to read," said Adrian, flinching. "But it struck me as the wail of one hardly responsible for her actions—half-crazed by jealousy."

"Come, come, Adrian, you are a man of the world. You must see, if we judged women by our standard, domestic life would go to smash utterly. Her case was fairly tried by the best talent in the land, and went against her from the first. The reading of

that letter before the referee made tatters of her reputation. She seemed to be dazed, offered almost no defense, slunk away into hiding, and has stayed there till now. No, Jack, no weakening to her. My motto is, if a woman once does wrong, believe the worst of her, and throw her overboard. However, I've got the law with me, and on that I stand."

"It is all abhorrent to me," answered Adrian, gloomily. "I think, if you please, we will never dig up this matter again."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Lorimer, with a look of relief. "I am glad to have done with it. Let us have a brandy to take the taste of the resurrection business out of our mouths."

He gave an order to a servant who appeared in answer to his ring, meanwhile watching Adrian narrowly and with evident nervousness. After he had partaken, alone, of a liberal portion of the contents of a small carafe, his spirits seemed to rebound.

"I'm doubly glad, my dear boy," he said,

"that you agree with Cleave and me this most regrettable matter should not be mentioned to your excellent father and mother."

"I can imagine nothing more unfortunate than to do so. If know they must, let it be later on. Now, I conceive my duty to shelter Gladys to be higher than that of letting them know the truth."

"Nobly said!" exclaimed Lorimer, his eyes flashing satisfaction.

"I hardly think you could realize the consequences were I to speak now."

Lorimer coughed. In his heart he felt that he realized them thoroughly. "Old school Blue Lights, eh?" he said, attempting jocularity. "They might, in plain words, be inclined to kick against the match."

"They would certainly oppose it, and withdraw their countenance," said Adrian, walking to and fro. "For myself, I'd care not a whit if they didn't give the money they have promised us to begin upon. I could trust to my own efforts to maintain her properly."

"Oh, my dear man, that's understood," protested Lorimer, looking white about the gills. "Of course I don't let her go to you penniless, . . . although Cleave has explained that, just now, my affairs are rather peculiarly tied up."

"Yes. The money question is the last my father would consider, under ordinary circumstances. But I can't hide from you what I know would follow any such announcement to him as that I have just been so unfortunate as to have to hear. It is not, therefore, very nice for me to go into marriage conscious of deceiving him. However, as I said, I consider that my first duty is to Gladys, poor child; and on that I stand or fall."

"Good, Jack! Splendid!" exclaimed Lorimer, effusively. "In my daughter's name, I thank you. Cleave says you will, in your own good time, inform your wife that her mother is still living."

"I accept the charge," said Adrian, gravely. "I hope the knowledge will never come

to Gladys through anyone less considerate of her feelings. Mr. Lorimer, one last question: Has that unhappy woman led a correct life since she left her child?"

"She says so," answered Lorimer, shrugging. "But I mean to be sure."

At this point a servant entered, and, halting at Lorimer's elbow, announced, automatically:

"Mr. Jones."

"Ha! the very man! Show him up," said the master of the house, whose florid skin had now regained its normal ruddiness.

Adrian, more shaken by their talk than he cared to let Lorimer see, walked over to the window, within earshot, however, of the dialogue that ensued between Lorimer and the peculiarly offensive and underbred personage now added to their number.

"Ha, Jones! You needn't mind Mr. Adrian. He is up to the whole affair, of course. What have you to report?" asked Lorimer, harshly.

"Did my best, sir," came in the little

man's mincing tones, keyed according to his notion of high society. "Put some of my prettiest work into the job. But so far, I regret to say, with no satisfactory result. Was unable to find out anything but what seemed on the straight."

"Well, the details," demanded Lorimer.

"Engaged her room at the hotel for a week from the date of arrival; must have funds or couldn't stand the cost. No callers, no letters or telegrams, no drinks or cigarettes. Was out all yesterday, took a hansom to Central Park, dismissed it at entrance, returned afoot, ordered no dinner, spent evening in room, reading. My orders went no further, sir, I think."

"No; and they stop here," said Lorimer.

"I hope you are satisfied with my good intentions, Mr. Lorimer. My work for you on other jobs of this kind has been more successful."

"That will do. Send your bill to the office. My cashier will settle it. Good-day."

The detective backed supinely to the door.

"And if there's any other little thing in this line you might want—" he began, but Lorimer had turned his back.

"Or you, Mr. Adrian," ventured Jones, offering Jack his card.

Adrian immediately turned and walked away, and the unappreciated genius went, crab-like, into obscurity.

"That woman's devilish deep!" flashed through Lorimer's mind. "Where did she get the cash for all this turnout?"

But his lips forced a smile as he faced Adrian.

"Not a pleasant part of it, I own."

"If this is your method of gaining information about her, I should prefer to have no news," said Adrian, hotly; and Lorimer's red face grew redder still.

"Perhaps not, Jack. You think me a cad, a brute, evidently. Very well. Perhaps I am. When a man's had his domestic life torn into tatters and flaunted before the public by a damned loose woman——"

"Let me remind you that you are speaking of Gladys's mother," interrupted the young man.

"All very well for the man who's never been bitten to have no fear of a mad dog. Cultivate as much as you please the divine virtue of forbearance with her class——"

"Apparently, this lady is not 'classed,'" said Adrian.

"Come, Adrian," resumed Lorimer, as the two pulled themselves up on the brink of a quarrel. "Man to man, you ought to sympathize with me."

"Mr. Lorimer, you are Gladys's father. From your hand I am soon to receive her at the altar. I owe you, and have shown you, every consideration. But the attitude you hold toward the person whom I wish, with all my heart, I had never heard of, makes my gorge rise, and I can't help it. If I wrong you, I ask your pardon, I can do no more."

Jack's face glowed with his honest emotions. Lorimer, surveying it with masked curiosity, ended by shaking him by the hand.

"My dear boy, you make me realize the flight of years. When you are my age you will be less inclined to—but there, good-by for the present. I am off to meet your good father for a final discussion of our affair. If all goes as we hope and expect, to-day will be marked with a white stone in the united families of Adrian and Lorimer. Together we'll make a deal that'll open the eyes of Wall Street. Come, man, put on a livelier face to meet your sweetheart. Gladys and my wife will, no doubt, join you here in a minute. Don't let them see that look on a happy bridegroom."

"You are right," said Adrian. "I think, for the present, I shall also take myself away, and try to get rid of my megrims."

"To resume duty later on," said Lorimer, jovially, but with an undercurrent of anxiety. "Come on, then, we'll go together to the parting of our ways."

Adrian hesitated, then hurried after his host. His sense of oppression in this room, formerly the temple of his love and hopes,

was overpowering. A few moments after he had left it, Gladys, coming in on tiptoe to surprise him, as she imagined, with a book in his usual armchair, knew the sharp disappointment of finding him flown.

"Jack! why, Jack!" she called. "He was certainly here a moment since, for the servants told me so. Oh! there are mamma and Dolly and Lina coming in to make a list of the wedding presents. What a bore that one never has a minute to one's self in these days!"

Directly there was a formidable entrance of Mrs. Lorimer, richly gowned in afternoon house dress, followed by the prospective bridesmaids, Dolly Gay and Lina Thurston, in walking costume, who forthwith darted like humming-birds about the room, assembling jewelers' packages and boxes on the large center-table, and giving vent to delighted exclamations as the unpacking progressed. Gladys, who, despite her sentiment, was only a mortal maiden, soon checked her sighs and made merry with her

friends, Mrs. Lorimer seating herself behind the blotter and inkstand, to make entries as each present was in turn disclosed.

Mrs. Lorimer was in excellent humor—almost at the climax of earthly satisfaction. Not only had the business combination of the Adrian and Lorimer families sufficed, at this most critical juncture in her husband's affairs, to tide over difficulty, but it had averted ruin and saved an exposure that would have meant disgrace in the public eye. Last, but not least, this marriage promised her a long-desired social opportunity.

She had never been able to conquer certain prejudices held against her in the circle in which the first Mrs. Lorimer had moved by right of birth and family connection. The best people, or those so considered by the second Mrs. Lorimer, had shown a persistent objection to admitting her farther than the outskirts of their little paradise. As Gladys grew into womanhood there had, indeed, been symptoms of a melting of the ice. Old friends of Gladys's lovely and unfor-

tunate mother had remembered the child's existence, pitied her, decided that it was her due to rejoin their ranks, in spite of the rather dubious papa and the indubitably vulgar stepmother. Invitations had begun to come for Miss Lorimer, from some of which it was impossible to exclude her parents. And, finally, the luck of this early marriage, with all its concomitants of good family and wealth, gave Mrs. Lorimer her chance to send out cards on her own account to every one of the people she most aspired to know. A list, pored over as pious anchorites pore over their breviaries, had been made by her. The secretary most *à la mode* for addressing envelopes had been secured, to prevent her making mistakes in generations, inviting divorced couples together, dead men and women "out of mind," or discarded members of fashionable cliques. The invitations finally sent out for the ceremony and reception embodied the second Mrs. Lorimer's highest ideals of the rewards of the strenuous life.

Also, Gladys once married and off her hands would remove her from a moral pressure she had recently had occasion to feel peculiarly galling. Mrs. Lorimer had, indeed, reached that second Summer of the materialist which finds restraint in self-indulgence the more trying because the Winter of discontent is in full view.

To Gladys, of course, fell the first duty of openings the boxes and parcels, reading cards, and handing the contents over to Dolly and Lina, who in turn submitted them to Mrs. Lorimer. The elder lady had provided herself with an elaborately bound blank book, in which she registered the gift, its number, a remark pertaining to it and the donor's name. As she thus obtained the pleasure of familiarly inscribing the nomenclature of several members of the paradise from which she had been hitherto shut out, the task was pleasing, and her smiles abounded, widening upon delicately tinged and powdered cheeks.

"Four hundred and forty-two!" cried

Dolly Gay, holding up a silver candelabrum in either hand. "Mr. and Mrs. Howard de Lancey. The sixth pair."

"Four hundred and forty-three!" exclaimed Lina Thurston, exhibiting a couple of bonbon dishes. "Miss Robinson. Eight of these altogether, and one odd one from a needy millionaire."

"Hush, my dear!" replied Mrs. Lorimer, in a conclusive tone, due to Miss Robinson's social eminence. "Write an *extremely* nice note to her, Gladys."

"One carriage clock. Mrs. Van Arden!" exclaimed Dolly, taking it from Gladys's indifferent hand.

"Mrs. Van Arden!" exclaimed Mrs. Lorimer, flushing proudly. "Let me see the card!"

"No mistake; it's from the Grand Panjandrum herself, with the little round button on the top!" cried Saucy Lina. "It looks second hand, Gladys, and will do for your fourth-story back."

"Lina! Miss Thurston!" interposed Mrs.

Lorimer, rebukingly. "Don't think of sending your note of thanks to Mrs. Van Arden, Gladys, without my looking over it. I am quite sure now that she will come to the wedding," she added, in an undertone of joy permeated with awe.

"I couldn't possibly be grateful for Mr. Clayton's horrid little spoons," whispered the lawless Dolly, holding the objects in question up for survey.

"My dears!" said Mrs. Lorimer, in her best Sunday-school manner, visibly strengthened by new social prospects, "we should be grateful for all intent at kindness from our fellow-men."

Lina laughed.

"After forty—perhaps," she said, with large indifference.

"I am obliged to leave you, young ladies," soon remarked Mrs. Lorimer, to whom the companionship of Gladys's bridesmaids was not proving an unqualified pleasure. "I have made an appointment to receive a visit before tea from the secretary of our

Association for Suppressing Vice in High Society."

"Did you expect to suppress it before tea, dear Mrs. Lorimer?" asked Lina.

"Take my place, Gladys," said the lady, rising and looking around her at the growing array of silverware and costly nothings encumbering tables and chairs. "How kind our friends have been!"

"All the bread you and Mr. Lorimer have cast upon matrimonial waters coming back to Gladys," said Lina.

"If one could have the trousseau and presents without the man!" added Dolly, thoughtfully. "But there seems no such combination possible."

A footman and page entering, burdened with more parcels, walked in line, with military precision, to the writing-table and surrendered them.

"No one has called with a box from Madame Collette?" asked Mrs. Lorimer of the footman, and was answered in the negative. "Too bad Collette should be behind

time! I especially wanted you to try the dress on to-day, as to-morrow will be so rushed, and I cannot remand the visit of our secretary," went on the lady, addressing the trio at the table. "That will do, Thomas; if a messenger from Collette calls, send her up at once."

"*The* dress?" asked Dolly, with prompt feminine ecstasy.

"*The* dress?" echoed Lina, rapturously.

"Oh, what luck we should be here when it comes home. Mine came yesterday, and is perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Miss Gay. "Collette has done herself proud."

"Look, girls!" cried Gladys, absorbed in a bulky parcel she had just undone; "was ever anything so sweet and dear?—a crazy cushion in silk patchwork, from that old duck of an Agnes! She began it when I was first engaged, and it's been such a mystery! Don't laugh, Dolly and Lina. For years, if I've stirred in the night, Agnes has come to me. She sleeps with one ear open for me, I tell her. . . . A bit of every-

body's best frocks. . . . Dear Agnes! No hands but her rough ones shall lace on my wedding-gown."

"Gladys, that's you all over," exclaimed Miss Gay, as the girl in a tender reverie stroked the cushion before replacing it in its box. "Here's a nice little promising parcel I'm dying to have you open. No card with it, either. Fancy not getting the credit of one's outlay!"

Smiling, and still under the spell of her old nurse's surprise, Gladys undid the tiny parcel placed in her hands by Dolly, all of the party exclaiming in satisfaction over the result. On a velvet bed lay a leaf of shamrock fashioned of costly emeralds, and hanging to a chain set with diamond and emerald points. It was a jewel that might have been worn by a king's daughter. A little chorus of admiration and wonder attended its passage from hand to hand. Even Mrs. Lorimer was arrested in her flight, to join in the speculation as to whence the dainty thing had come.

"This is, to my taste, the most delicious ornament you've had!" cried Lina, enviously. "No doubt some of Jack's family have sent it; but who—who could consent to do such an adorable action unknown to fame?"

While the pendant rested in its new owner's rosy palm, and Gladys's brow knitted with wonderment as to the giver, the footman, returning, announced to his mistress the presence of Miss Pincher in the reception-room down-stairs.

"Our honored secretary. Say I will come directly," exclaimed Mrs. Lorimer. "But first I must put some of these things away in a place of safety." Gladys assisted her while she carried a number of the more conspicuous articles across the room, placing them on the shelves of a closet. But the girl did not thus resign her latest gift, the chain of which she had thrown around her neck. For some unfathomable reason this token had at once assumed to her a value and importance unknown in her other pres-

ents. Her one desire was to be free to fly to the telephone and confide the fact of its arrival to Jack. Making a device of showing other bridal finery in her bedroom to her friends, she rid herself of these laughing maidens and flew out on the landing of the stairs, passing through a doorway curtained with greenish-gray velours that made a perfect setting for her white-robed figure and roseate bloom.

As she stood waiting eagerly at the instrument she seemed a very image of youthful hope and love. Her ripe lips bent themselves to the mouthpiece tenderly, her voice thrilled with happiness when answering her lover's challenge.

"Oh, you *are* there!" she said, with a little, satisfied sigh. "I was so afraid I'd miss you again. Jack, who could have sent me the loveliest pendant and chain all set with emeralds? Some of your people, I think. No? Well, do hurry up and see it. I was so disappointed when I found you were gone. Good-by."

"Gladys!" called Mrs. Lorimer, rather crossly.

"Yes, mamma," she said, returning to the morning-room.

"Now this is finished, I hope we may have a little rest. Pray do not encourage those girls to remain longer. Their eternal giggling and answering back gets on my nerves."

"Poor mamma! We are upsetting you and your house!" cried Gladys. "Never mind; in a little while you'll be rid of me, and Jack will have all the bother."

"Nobody can say I've not done my best by that child," thought Mrs. Lorimer, as the bedroom door closed on the disturber of her peace. "But the marriage is a big relief. When it's over, and Dick and I go abroad, we'll see if I don't treat myself to a little let-up from the devoted stepmother business."

## V

AS Mrs. Lorimer walked across the Persian rug, on which her silken skirts rustled aggressively, pomp and the pride of life written in every line of her face and figure, the door on the stairs opened and the footman ushered in a woman carrying by a strap handle a modiste's box covered with black oilskin.

The newcomer was tall, especially graceful, clad in close-fitting dark tweeds, her bronze hair covered by the little veil of black gauze drawn across her face. She paused on entering, and Mrs. Lorimer, though near-sighted and thick-skinned as well as panoplied in her own importance, could not fail to observe the slight defiance of her pose as she halted near the door. The lady of the house did not, however, consider that the

personality of a mere dressmaker's young person warranted the exertion of lifting her gold-handled lorgnon for a closer investigation. As a rule, she treated all her employees as inevitable offenders, and addressed them accordingly.

"I must say Madame Collette has taken her time about the dress," she said, icily. "Thomas, send Coralie to me."

Coralie, the lady's maid, as anxious as the rest of the feminine establishment concerning this arrival, was on the footman's heels. She came in with the air of an admiral assuming command of a quarter-deck, swooped on the newcomer's burden and patronizingly desired her to wait for the box.

"She will stay, of course, to make any trifling alteration needed. You will be competent for that, I suppose, although I shall certainly inform Madame Colette that I do not permit her to send me persons of bad manners and evidently sullen temper."

As Coralie, with a superior smirk, glided off with the box, the stranger did not in the

least degree alter her pose, nor did she speak a word.

"Go over there and sit in the alcove by the window," said Mrs. Lorimer, sharply. "If they want you, they will call you to Miss Lorimer. Otherwise, you will take your box and go."

The woman softly crossed the room and withdrew into the retreat indicated, Mrs. Lorimer following her progress by a high-pitched order to the servant, given with insulting emphasis:

"Thomas, until Agnes comes do you stay here; and, remember, you are responsible for the valuables around."

Directly afterward Agnes hurried into the room, and Thomas, tongue in cheek, betook himself down-stairs to narrate the incident. Agnes, looking about her nervously, ran over to the dressmaker's assistant and folded her in her arms.

"My lamb! To come back to your own old home again like this! It is more than ye can bear. Stop trembling child; do."

"It is rage that's making me tremble," cried Marian, stormily. "That insolent creature treating me like a thief! Oh, I could kill her, Agnes!"

"My dear, my dear, I told ye how it would be," pleaded the old woman, terrified.

"No, I can control myself, and will. Only, when shall I see my child?"

"You must chance it, honey. Very likely she'll send for ye in there. Keep cool and brave."

"I'm brave as Julius Cæsar," said Marian; "and I'll die sooner than betray myself."

"You're crying now. Oh, dear, dear! And ye were cool as a cucumber in the cab."

With a mighty effort Marian conquered her emotion, answering in a gay tone:

"I always loved adventure, and you know I'm a splendid actress. Don't bother that poor old head of yours and, trust me, all will go well."

To quiet herself she walked to and fro in the room, noting the changes in decorations,

pictures, and furniture. To this house, then so far up-town as to be regarded as a pioneer's experiment, she had removed when her husband's first rapid rise of fortune justified the outlay. Into its building had gone her cherished ideas of nicety and conformity to their station in life. The very books on the shelves had been bought and often handled by her. A thousand recollections assailed her of the disillusionment that had here resulted from talks and quarrels with her husband. It was here, too, that she had come to the desperate resolution that wrecked her life. Almost any other room in the house would have meant less to her, except Gladys's old nursery. That threshold she would never have dared to cross with feet that had strayed so far from it into a way so thorny! . . .

With eyes blinded by tears she espied on a side-table littered with photographs, miniatures, and dainty bits of silver, a picture framed in glittering rhinestones, and stooped to it, uttering a cry of joy.

"This is she, Agnes! It speaks! It breathes!"

"Her last. Taken for the bridegroom," nodded Agnes, assentingly; then, at the sound of a peal of laughter from the bedroom, turned her gaze nervously in that direction.

Marian, with a quick movement, slipped the photograph out of the frame and into the bosom of her blouse, and, with Agnes, lent ear to the voices beyond the closed door.

"That's not her laugh, Agnes," she exclaimed; "there's a hard note in it."

"That's Miss Thurston, one of the bridesmaids, but a good girl eno'," said the old woman. "That other's little Miss Gay, who's always a-bubbling like a spring in the woods in the old country."

"Why doesn't *she* laugh, Agnes?" asked Marian, listening eagerly. "Is she sad, or sorry for anything? It can't be she isn't happy in her choice."

"Bless ye, she's just dead in love with Mr. Adrian," said Agnes, chuckling; "and

small blame to my girl, ayther, as the sayin' is. Every servant in this house wants to go and live with 'em."

The door opened. Marian started electrically. But it was only the lady's maid, carrying a sash or scarf of white transparent stuff fringed with orange blossoms, which she handed to Marian.

"Miss Lorimer thinks these orange blossoms should be tacked in place," she said, giggling in a genteel manner. "They're that loose they'll be falling off before the bride gets up the church aisle."

"I will do it," said Marian, taking the sash eagerly. "I have my sewing things in my pocket."

Agnes breathed more freely when the maid departed. Mrs. Hatch returned to the retired corner of the great bay window, and, sitting behind a clump of palms and rubber trees, fell to work, while Agnes set about picking up bits of wrapping paper and boxes, and tidying the room. A noise outside made Marian start again.

"Agnes, is Gladys coming out?" she said.

"Tut! tut!" answered the nurse; "if it isn't madam coming back again! I did hope that secretary female would keep her below—settling the hash of every sinner God let be born into the world, except their two selves. Child, ye can't stay here! You're shaking like a leaf. Go, quick. I'll make some excuse for ye."

"It's too late, and I wouldn't if I could," said Marian, doggedly, drawing back farther into her hiding-place.

"Our budget was smaller than usual to-day," observed Mrs. Lorimer, whom a course of Miss Pincher's flattering homage had put again on her righteous pedestal. "Well, Agnes, is all right? Is that saucy person gone? Have you seen the wedding gown?"

She advanced to enter the bedroom door, but was met by the maid, who informed her that Miss Lorimer begged madam to wait where she was for a few moments, and would she send Agnes, please?

"Very well. Go, Agnes; I have a letter here I will read meanwhile," said the lady, subsiding into an armchair Mr. Lorimer had once sent home for Marian's use in holding her baby.

Agnes, with a miserable side glance at Marian's covert, followed Coralie. But the old woman need not have feared any increase of temptation to self-betrayal on the culprit's part through the fact of Mrs. Lorimer's presence in the room. It but served to stiffen Marian's resolution to carry on her effort to the end. She felt that she would rather die than let this woman have a chance to order her in contumely from the house. But she had not counted on the ordeal next befalling her: nothing less than the entrance into the morning-room of Lorimer himself, whom Agnes and she had ascertained to have left the house before they ventured to drive up to it.

Marian's blood ran chiller in her veins than ever she had known it in the sad years of tribulation, but she dared not follow her

proud impulse to spring to her feet, avow herself and take the consequences. She cowered farther back into her corner, feeling, rather than seeing, Lorimer go up behind his wife and draw her face backward for a kiss.

"It's all right, Madge, old girl," he said, in deeply exultant tones. "By George, we've turned the corner."

"You've won, Dick? We're safe? How?" she asked, nervously.

"Hush. Not here! I'll tell you later. It's the biggest thing of my life, and only you know how near we've come to everlasting smash. Those old, prating Puritanical fools, the Adrians, are fairly in the net, and I'll make 'em pay high for the privilege. Come, Madge, toss those Social Purity letters of yours into the waste-basket. Just as soon as we're foot-free from the girl we'll go abroad and have a jolly time on our own account. We'll have money to burn, Mag; money to burn. And that's better than dancing to the tune of the society fiddle

here, where, spite of all, the women still give you the go-by."

"You promise?" she asked, sharply. "No backing out, mind, on the score of business. You'll take me abroad, spend money freely, and let me get a rest from these old reforms and charities?"

"I need change myself, Mag. I'm overworked, overworried, and besides, I've been seeing ghosts. Yes, I'll treat; to a high figure, too. Hang me, Mag, if I know any younger woman that's a patch on you for charm! I'm dead stuck on you, madam, and I'm not ashamed of it!"

He kissed her again, and Marian heard a cooing voice in answer:

"If I had only been the first!"

"Why, Mag, I care more for your little finger than I did for her whole spoilt, hysterical body."

"Yet she was called pretty," said the cooing voice again.

"Humph! When I married her she was pretty, and devilish lively and bright—all

fine words; but she broke my love up when she got to thinking too much of me—exacting too much. You, Mag, have a different hand on the reins. But here lately, I'll own up, I've sometimes thought it might have been different with *her*, you know, if I'd been a little easier. I do believe she loved me once."

"Loved you! that creature? Don't deceive yourself." The voice was sharp and hard now, with an undertone of eager malice. Marian, whose head had been bowed like a rain-drenched flower, straightened herself suddenly.

"Perhaps you're right," answered the man. "A fellow gets to be a softy sometimes, when he thinks of long ago."

"She never loved you. She disgraced you publicly. Remember the sting of that."

"Damn her! I don't forget," said Lorimer, firing up.

"There's my own Dick again! I declare, you frighten me, harking back to that de-

graded woman. What could have possessed you! For my part, I don't see how she could have had the heart to give you up. Nobody's so handsome as you, Dick —so clever, so successful."

"Mag, you bewitch me when you look like that. After all, a grown daughter's a weight we'll feel lighter to be rid of. We'll begin life over again, from this on. There's plenty of fun ahead, and we'll go the pace."

Marian, in an agony, had started to her feet. The air around her seemed stifling, the scent of the flowers in the window boxes made her gasp, the blood beat in her temples. It was not this she had bargained for in steeling herself to meet the ordeal of returning, like a thief, into her former home.

The moan that escaped her was, fortunately, unheard by the other occupants of the room, for at that instant came from Gladys's bedroom the chant of the Wedding March from "Lohengrin," sung by fresh young voices. Through the leaf screen Ma-

rian saw old Agnes come out first, holding back the portières for the passage of Dolly and Lina, walking and singing, hand in hand. After them followed Gladys, her slight young figure arrayed in a robe of white satin, the tip of the long straight train of which was jealously caught up from contact with the floor by Coralie, the maid. Then the girls halted, Gladys passing between them, and, with a sudden impulse, kneeling at her father's feet.

By this impetuous movement of lonely girlhood the little comedy of rehearsal was suddenly changed in character.

Gladys bent her veiled head upon her father's knee and burst into sudden tears. While the unseen mother stretched out her arms with a mighty longing to her child, Mr. Lorimer looked annoyed, embarrassed, drew back and finally rose to his feet, speaking in harsh, sarcastic tones.

"Very pretty, my dear, but a trifle theatrical. Keep that sort of thing for Jack, when you want to score a point."

In his heart he was repeating, "Her mother, to a dot." The resemblance, less of person than of manner and expression, stabbed him like an avenging knife. His impulse, manlike, was to put the door between him and the girl as soon as possible; and brusquely inviting his wife to go with him into the billiard-room and be rid of these frills and follals, he hurried out, Mrs. Lorimer elaborately following.

All the mirth had gone out of the little group. Gladys, pale and pained, dropped into a chair, Agnes hovering protectively around her; Coralie disappeared; the two visitors, making voluble excuse that they had already overstayed their time, kissed Gladys sympathetically, and with looks that spoke volumes took their leave.

Gladys turned to Agnes with a swift glance of despair.

"You see! you see!" she cried, pitifully. "He hated to look at me. What did I remind him of, Agnes? Was it my own

mother? Oh! if she were only here there'd be one in the world besides you to care to see me in my wedding gown!"

"May I try the sash now, Miss Lorimer?" said an exceedingly soft voice beside her. Gladys started and sat up, shocked at her exposure of secret grief to alien ears. Her impulse was to speak haughtily and dismiss the intruder, but one glance into the large, soft, yearning eyes bent upon her, made her, on the contrary, rise obediently and stand before a mirror in the panel of the wall, where a good effect of their work might be obtained. She did not observe that Agnes, drawing off abruptly, had gone over to the far end of the room, leaving them quite alone.

"You saw me come in? You are quite satisfied with the gown?" asked the girl, making a strong effort to conquer her recent agitation.

"Oh, more than satisfied. It is quite perfect. I can find fault with not the smallest thing," answered the dressmaker, and

again the tender cadence of her tones fell soothingly on Gladys's ear.

"We were not quite sure about the lace ending on the folds of the train behind," went on the bride-elect, taking a little additional comfort from the loveliness of her own reflection at full length.

"I will adjust it," said the other, sinking to her knees, and, unseen by Gladys, almost burying her face in the shining, pearly folds of the train and the film of lace that covered it—welcome hiding place for that eloquent countenance of hers. The first touch of her child's warm young body had intoxicated her with long-restrained mother-love. Into her heart, seared with sorrow and scorn from her fellow-beings, flowed a sudden divine current. It banished the old fury from her veins, recreated all that woman owns most nearly akin to the angels.

"That's better, I think," said Gladys, surveying herself again. "Now, if you will lift the veil and let me slip the sash around my waist——"

"No! no!" exclaimed Marian, jealously. "You must not stir, please. I can do it all much better."

She had been anticipating the moment when her hands might clasp that pretty, slim waist. Eagerly her arms stole about her child, but when it became needful to withdraw them, without the embrace she coveted, the effort was too great. Her heart bounded wildly, her brain grew dizzy; she tottered, and Agnes caught her as she swayed backward.

"Why," cried Gladys, innocently, "the poor thing's ill, Agnes; she's faint. Put her in that chair while I fetch water, or—I saw brandy over on that table in the corner—I'll get that."

As the bride hastened in search of stimulants Agnes breathed in Marian's ear an imploring request to keep up, for God's sake, until she could get her safely from the house.

"I will, I promise you. It's passing now," said Mrs. Hatch, to whom Gladys at

once returned, carrying a glass of brandy, which she put to her mother's lips.

"How good you are—how dear!" whispered Marian, in reviving tones. "If you knew how ashamed I feel——"

"Don't think of it!" cried the girl. "I'm afraid you aren't strong; you look so white and tired. Collette shouldn't have sent you out to-day."

"I am getting better and stronger every moment," protested Marian. "I should be so mortified not to finish. There's a stitch or two still wanting to the skirt."

"If you really care so much," said Gladys, assentingly; and again the mother knelt behind the child, trying to thread a needle, and failing for her tears, till Agnes, in sympathetic dumb show, offered to accomplish it for her, and fumbled from the same cause.

"Why, you blind old bat!" cried Gladys, playfully, snatching the needle and thread from her nurse's hand. "It's a shame to keep her waiting on her knees. I believe—now don't contradict me, Agnes—you're

crying to see your baby in her wedding finery!"

Laughingly, she passed the threaded needle to Marian, who resumed her task, while Gladys went on chatting with her nurse, gladdening the old woman's heart by praises of her wedding gifts, then turning to eulogy of the anonymous present recently received.

"Such a lovely pendant, Agnes; just what suits me; just what I want! Nothing but Jack's pearls has given me such pleasure. A bit of your own Irish shamrock, Agnes; and I've got it on at this minute, under my gown. Somehow—you'll think me silly—but it seems to warm my heart. . . . It's the kind of thing a mother would have chosen for her girl—and I need a mother, Agnes. Why!—" she interrupted herself, arrested by a sudden movement of the dressmaker—"look, Agnes! The poor thing's ill again. I knew she was not fit!"

"All is finished now, at any rate," stammered Marian, pulling herself to her feet,

though deadly pale and tremulous. "Please, Miss Lorimer, do not think of me again. I cannot bear to cloud your happiness."

"Rest a while, do," said the girl. "Over there, by the open window, is a little chair. Make her go, Agnes, and stay by her till she is better. I'll run away, now, and make Coralie take this off."

With the music of her child's voice ringing like joy bells in her brain, Marian, too weak, indeed, to resist, found her way back to the spot she had occupied before, Agnes attending her. But ere the little bride could carry her silken glories into seclusion, Adrian, who had accused himself of being a cold-blooded wretch unworthy of her trustful love in leaving the house without seeing her, returned. Coming in with the air of one accustomed to invade the place, he was caught on the threshold and transfixed by the lovely apparition of his promised wife.

"Oh, Jack!" cried Gladys. "Don't look, for the world! It's bad luck for you to look."

"I won't," he answered, shielding his eyes with his hat, but peeping over it, well pleased, at her image in the mirror.

"In two minutes I'll be back," she said, hurrying away from him. "Please read, or something, and presently I'll give you your tea."

He laughingly complied, or appeared to do so, by dropping into a chair and taking up a book.

"Agnes," said Marian, in a whisper, "go after her. Leave me alone with Mr. Adrian. I must speak to him; I must, I tell you. Go!"

The nurse, attempting protest, was overridden by imperious insistence, and Marian, her face and neck dyed crimson, advanced to Adrian, pausing beside his chair and addressing him by name.

He looked up from his book. She had not in the least overcalculated the effect on him of her presence in this place. He sat staring at her in bewildered, horrified silence, then, remembering social courtesy, rose.

A long, ghastly gaze was bestowed by each upon the other. In him, the whole miserable truth was unrolling itself, taking shape in his mind, localizing itself beyond a peradventure. In her, the shame of thus avowing herself a secret marauder in the home from which she had been cast out struggled with her grief at inflicting such shame on him.

And with this man, before whom she now cowered with bent head, she had but a few short days ago felt herself on equal terms as friend, adviser, comrade.

He spoke first.

"Why are you here? How dared you come here? he asked, in a tone she had never heard from him before.

"Have you not heard the story of Gladys's mother?" she asked.

"Last night, for the first time, from Mr. Cleave. God knows I did not dream of your identity with her till now."

"Then you know one dares anything to avoid falling back into a pit. Mr. Adrian,

she could not recognize me. No one here suspects me. It was my last chance."

"It is a fearful risk for you and all of us," he said, gloomily.

"Gladys does not dream that her mother lives. For the others, I care nothing. I was starving for my child. Would you have let me go away unsatisfied? Ah, Mr. Adrian, I know you better. You wouldn't treat a tramp like that. You've the kindest heart in the world. Now that I know you're to have her, I am so much happier."

He did not answer, but his face softened.

"Don't forget what you said—'If you need me, I'll be there,'" she went on, encouraged. "I do need you, now, Mr. Adrian—awfully. Be forbearing, forgiving with me for this last offense. Let me plead with you to deal tenderly with my child. Take her away from these cold, cruel people; take her into a home, a real home, where the world and the devil are kept like wolves at bay. Whatever comes to try your love,

cling close to each other. Confide in her, cherish her, trust her, and she will never disappoint you. Oh, I can see your two lives blending into one and stretching out down the long years in happiness and peace. Do you think, then, it is likely I'd want to trouble you? Believe me, I am not selfish. After this, I am going back to the realm of homeless spirits, and neither you nor she shall hear of me—never, never, never! There, Mr. Adrian, I've touched you. One word more—when the time comes for you to tell her about her mother, be as merciful as you can."

She paused, choking. Jack looked at her with strong compassion.

"I hate to let you go like this. You have my club address. Write me sometimes how you fare, and if you are ever in any distress that I can help, command me; but, my dear lady, you must know that every moment you linger here is dangerous. For Gladys's sake, Mrs. Hatch, do not delay."

Dusk was falling in the room as Gladys

hurried back, gowned in her simple home attire. Marian, at the same moment, crossed the room and stood in a waiting attitude beside the door.

"Oh, you are waiting for your box?" said the young lady, pleasantly. "I believe Agnes is fetching it. Yes, here she is; and you must tell Madame Collette we congratulate her on the gown, but she must really take better care of you. Agnes, go and put her in the cab. Good-by, and many thanks for your trouble."

"Good-by," breathed Marian, softly, standing statue-like, while Jack Adrian, feeling tremulous as a woman, came up behind his bride. The moments seemed to him interminable before the door should close on hapless Mrs. Hatch.

"Might I—to you who are so good and thoughtful of others, Miss Lorimer," said the woman, in a low, strained tone—"would you let me offer you my congratulations on your marriage?"

Gladys turned, smiling, blushing, with a

nestling movement toward her lover. To her surprise, his face was grave and shadowed as she had never seen it. She thought for an instant there was moisture in his eyes, and the nurse emitted a sound that seemed strangely like a sob.

But no; impossible. Gladys laughed at herself for the notion that everyone was keyed to her own pitch of sentiment.

But there stood the strange woman gazing at her with yearning, beseeching eyes, and Adrian, leaning down, said to her, gently:

"Give her your hand, dearest. One is never too rich in good wishes, do you think?"

Gladys held out her hand shyly, and Marian pressed it to her lips without speaking.

"Come, Gladys, to the library. I think we shall find everybody there," said Adrian, breaking the trying silence, in dread of what might occur. With an arm around her he led her out of the room.

"It is very, very odd," said Gladys, wonderingly. "One might almost think she loved me—but why?"

"Why, indeed, sweetheart?" he said, laughingly. But in his heart Adrian did not laugh.

"And this is the very end! oh, God!" exclaimed the mother, left behind.

"My dearie, my lamb, go, now," said the nurse. "The way's clear, and you've had your heart's wish. Take the cab, drive back to your hotel, and after my bit of supper I'll come and look after ye."

"Agnes, I believe something told her I am her mother!" cried Marian, wildly.

The woman seized her by the arm.

"There, hurry! What did I tell ye? It's the mistress coming in. Pick up the box and go. Lord save us! she mustn't find ye here like this."

But Marian stood, stupid, spellbound. A moment more, and Mrs. Lorimer, announcing her coming fussily, sailed into the room and stood peering suspiciously into the gathering dark.

"Gladys! Jack! where are you? Tea is waiting in the library. Where in the

world is everybody? Why haven't they lit these lights?"

Stepping back, she touched a button by the door, and a soft radiance filled every corner of the room. She saw Marian in tears, saw Agnes wringing her hands behind her—and recognition came.

"You! . . . You?" asked Mrs. Lorimer, a flutter of terror in her voice. "Why did you come here?"

Marian haughtily faced her.

"I once had occasion to ask the same question in the same place of you, madam, and when you were the intruder and I on my own ground. I had very good reason for knowing that your motives were less creditable to you then than mine are now to me."

"I knew that you were alive, but I never dreamed you would have the impudence to push yourself in here," cried the woman, wrathfully. "This is Agnes's work, letting you in; and out she'll walk after you, the vile deceiver!"

"Having accomplished what I came for, I will relieve you of my presence," said Marian, whom danger had made cool.

Her daring seemed to dominate the situation, for Mrs. Lorimer did not stir until, as Marian passed, the hidden photograph of Gladys fell from her dress to the floor.

"As I supposed. Stealing my property! Who knows what else you have got stowed away about you?" she said, spitefully, snatching the picture from Marian's hands as the latter stooped to pick it up. "Oh, you needn't think you'll just walk out as you came in! People of your stripe must be managed by the police," and she put herself threateningly in Marian's path.

"Let me pass!" said Marian, firmly.

"You shall not, I tell you!" cried Mrs. Lorimer, ringing the bell close to her hand.

"You can harm only yourself by this," Marian said, shrugging her shoulders lightly. "For me, the worst has come and gone."

"Ask Mr. Lorimer to come to me here, immediately," said the lady of the house to

the servant answering the bell. "Then stand at the front door, and let no one leave the house!"

The man, glancing suspiciously at Marian, then interrogatively at Agnes, hurried away, and there was no delay in the arrival of Mr. Lorimer.

"What's all this, Madge?" he said, on the threshold. "Charles says there's been a theft of some kind—some of the wedding presents——"

His sentence was cut short. His glance fell on Marian. Black wrath filled his face.

"You—you impudent, lying—!" he began; but she interrupted him.

"Let me go. I have seen my child. She does not know me. I have done no one harm," she cried, proudly.

"Vile, degraded creature!" cried Mrs. Lorimer. "Your presence in this house is an insult to Gladys and to me. But that's not the point. You stole one thing; no doubt you've secreted others. Give them up, or I'll have you searched."

"Oh, she's in no need of stealing, Mag," interpolated Lorimer, insultingly. "She's got her pocket full of cash, and knows how to get more, too."

"Then we'll just turn her out in the street, where she belongs," added his wife, seeing Marian flinch and grow white under his stinging words.

"Stop!" cried the goaded creature, suddenly. "Not another word till I have said my say. I wanted to go in peace, but you wouldn't let me. Then let us have it out! Oh, since I came into this house to-day I've tasted heaven and hell. When my child spoke to me, smiled on me, when I touched her warm, young flesh, and realized that it was part of mine—when I felt once more the glad thrill of motherhood warming my veins, pulsing in my sad heart, I was drawn out of my gulf of misery as if by an angel's touch. There's no sacrifice I wouldn't have made to keep good enough for Gladys. There was no rancor left in my heart for any living being. I could have forgiven even

you, Dick Lorimer, for the ruin of my life. But it wasn't to last. I hadn't deserved such bliss. I'd been walking up the arch of a rainbow, and when I reached the top found that I must go down on the other side. But thank God you two can't rob me of the supreme hour of happiness that I have known! Yet now, *now*—do you see?—you have dragged me back into hell. This hypocritical woman, with her vicious taunts—you, with your cold brutality—have made me desperate. To punish you I'd risk any sentence. When I crossed that threshold, this afternoon, I was a penitent, soft-hearted woman, yearning to walk in the right path. Now I'm bitter, vindictive, dangerous; and you've only yourselves to thank for it!"

"Dick, send for a policeman," exclaimed Mrs. Lorimer, shrinking to her husband's side.

"Let her rave herself out, and then turn her loose," observed Lorimer. "I was the worst kind of a fool to parley with her at all, and I suppose I must reap the consequence."

"Put my life beside that woman's, will you?" said Marian, scathingly, "or match it with your own, Dick Lorimer, and then let heaven be judge between us."

"There will be time enough for that," he answered, coldly. "For the present, the world suffices me, and you will not deny that its verdict is in our favor. If you take my dispassionate advice, Mrs. Hatch, you'll give up this cheap tragedy business and go back to—say—the—er—sidewalk."

"You *dare?*" she cried, furiously. "Then, Mr. Lorimer, let me tell you that if I can't answer your foul words in kind I can avenge myself in another way. What of the combination in business by which you have just saved yourself from ruin and disgrace through the marriage of your daughter to Jack Adrian? What if Adrian's people—if Adrian himself—knew you as you are? Would you be so content with your position then?"

"Hold your mischievous tongue, will you?" he cried, savagely, putting his hand

on the bell, "or, in two minutes, my servants shall turn you out of doors for a common sneak-thief."

"Ring, then! Call all your household, if you choose. Let me tell my story first to them, and afterward to whomsoever it may concern."

"Damn you, I'm not afraid of you!" he shouted, and to prove it touched the bell.

There was a moment's critical silence, while Lorimer, stubborn and somber, remained facing Marian, old Agnes clinging to her sleeve and praying her to have self-control. Mrs. Lorimer, cowed and whimpering, sat crouched in an armchair. When the two menservants, presenting themselves, stood awaiting orders on either side of the door, Marian felt herself keyed to the highest pitch of nervous desperation. Now, indeed, was she fairly reckless of results.

In her veins ran the hot fire of vengeance. In spite of Lorimer's bravado she saw that her mention of his private affairs in the matter of the alliance with the Adrians had

hit hard. Her quick wit taught her that with this weapon in hand she had only to strike again to be more than even with those who had so cruelly wronged and wounded her. The thought of their discomfiture was a sweet morsel in her mouth. To speak out before their menials, to publish them to the world as they were, seemed the most precious privilege now left her. The flicker of appeal in the woman's coward eyes, the brutal rage in Lorimer's, were an irresistible invitation to Marian to do her worst.

While she stood, unconsciously framing her sentences so that they might cause most shame and pain, her whole being transformed with the strength of her emotion, a soft sound came to her ear—the sound of a girl's voice on the landing of the stairs—Gladys bantering her sweetheart and laughing joyously.

Instantly Marian's form relaxed from its tense, impassioned pose, a great change came over her face; she listened, trembling vio-

lently, and the vengeful gleam of her eyes was drowned in tears.

"I—I will go now," she gasped, bowing her head before her enemies.

"I thought so," sneered Lorimer, but he had the wisdom to say no more.

Marian gave him one last, mute, terrible look; then, lifting her box weakly, the unwelcome Mrs. Hatch passed, conquered and broken, out into the night.

## VI

IT was a stale Midsummer morning in a quarter of New York where the jarring clatter of wheels over cobble-stones, the ceaseless whiz of elevated trains, and the cries of children squeezed out of overcrowded homes to play in the street, made existence to weak and weary brains tolerable only in the rear of the houses wherein their possessors were compacted. In a back room, at a window opening on a fire-escape, which some deft hand had decked with a few boughs of wildwood greenery thrust into glass preserve jars, a woman sat at work.

When she looked out over the green boughs hers was the privilege of seeing the sunshine, so blinding in the street, here fall partially filtered through the foliage of an ailantus tree in the next yard. This tree,

a morning-glory vine creeping up from the fire-escape of a German woman below them, and the fair field of azure overspreading all, were her present substitutes for the beauties of nature with which she had formerly been familiar at Newport and Bar Harbor at this season of the year.

Her inward vista ended in a dark middle room, every spot of whose ceiling, every crack of whose faded wall-paper, she had scanned while lying on her back, staring upward with hot eyes, during the recent weeks of a long and painful illness. There, in the far corners, stood two little iron beds made up with exquisite neatness and conventual purity of linen. One of these beds she had thought never to leave till carried from it with rigid feet foremost down the common stairway of the tenement-house. But now between the half-open sliding-doors, with their panels of cheaply ornamented ground glass, she surveyed it with the complacency of a graduated invalid.

In a spot screened by a clothes-horse covered with cotton stuff, a gas stove stood on a pine table that was additionally encumbered with the few utensils and supplies requisite to the canary-bird ménage of two women, one of whom ate through gratitude to another, who had in these days more appetite than food.

In spite of its cleanly squalor and the paucity of its furnishings, the place wore a strangely festal air. Long scarfs of multicolored gauzes hung from a golden Maypole. Japanese lanterns fastened to sticks decked with tinsel fringes were ranged around the walls. Stuffed birds swung in gilded hoops. A parterre of paper roses, red and white, bloomed on the mantelpiece, otherwise arrayed with odds and ends of old china, shells, fancy mugs and photographs, such as a family servant might accumulate from a lifetime of little gifts. The table at which the wan worker sat was ablaze with sheets of brightly tinted tissue-paper, gay ribbons

and a variety of finished toys in the guise of cotillion favors.

When at last the final touches were bestowed on a French Polichinelle in cap and ruffle affixed to the summit of a gilded staff, she held him aloft, yielding him glad and whimsical homage.

'There, Mr. Polichinelle," she cried, joyously. "You are all ready for the Egertons' dance at Newport! You've a conceited smirk on that jolly red face of yours. Now, don't go and be so set up by your rise in life as to forget your old friends and your humble origin. Remember, my boy, that pride goes before a fall, and you're not, like me, constructed to survive a smash. I wonder if you realize what you're going from, and where you will bring up. Here—poverty, distress, a poor, battered woman whom fate would not spare when she prayed to be set adrift on the unknown sea, working her heart out to make you beautiful! There—lights, music, flowers, the soft sea air, the sparkle of gems, the rustle and gleam of

satins, and smiling dancers, whirling in a brilliant round! But don't let it take you in, Polichinelle! I've been there. I know it all by heart. In those days life seemed one long reach of shining parquetry, to be whirled over to the music of a hidden orchestra. Is it better to have had and lost, like me, Polichinelle, or never to have had at all, like you? Do I envy you? God knows I don't. My star's behind another kind of cloud. Now, dear sir, accept this tinsel cravat as a last token of my esteem! Polichinelle, I'll swear you're the image of old Beau Bannister, who used to dangle in my train. He'll be at the ball, so look out for your twin. Really, I think you're as well fitted to express ideas as he is, poor old dear!"

She laughed. For a moment she was again Marian Lorimer in the heyday of her insolent young beauty, queening it among the fine folk who delighted to pattern after her.

Then the door opened and an old woman

came in, carrying a homely basket on her arm, and hot and breathless from three flights of steps.

"Laughing, my dear?" she said, with a sort of patient cheerfulness now become her habitual manner. "Thank the Lord ye feel like it! And what do ye suppose? I've not only got the money for your candle-shades from Laferrière, but an order for twelve more in palest green. And you'd better believe I stopped at the provision shop! Here's meat for soup, and the beautifulest little fat Spring chicken ye ever saw, with tea, sugar, a little bottle of cream and a whole half-pound of that butter ye like the best—little finger rolls, too. You'll lunch like Queen Victoria to-day."

Marian ran over to her and examined the contents of her basket gleefully.

"I never saw such richness, dear," she said; "but—what's here for Agnes?"

"Oh, childie, with a cup o' that grand tea and a slice o' buttered toast I'll be in clover," was the answer.

"Agnes, you're an unblushing old fraud!" exclaimed the lady. "Now if you don't eat with me, share and share alike, I vow I'll starve."

"Child, sure as ye live, I stopped in a restaurant and had a plate of stew. It'll be tomorrow before I feel hungry again. Lucky I paid rent for these rooms so long ahead! That poor Mrs. Murphy above us has to turn out o' hers, and we're good for another month, thank God."

"My illness, two doctors part of the time, a trained nurse and expensive medicines have made an awful vacuum in your little hoard," said Marian, mournfully. "You shouldn't have done it in such style, nursey. A hospital for me would have been far wiser, and you know it."

"What's the odds, so long as ye pulled through? I never was forehanded in my life, Mrs. Lorimer, any more than ye. We're a pair of babies for spending money, child."

"But now I am well again, Agnes—so splendidly well——"

"Yes, splendidly well," echoed Agnes, as the speaker paused for an assenting answer.

"—and I have made such a capital start in business, it won't be any time before we recoup again, and I'll pay you back with interest. All will come out right, with such orders as Mrs. Egerton's to start on."

"Bless Miss Thurston's heart for getting it for ye!" cried Agnes, infected by her zeal.

"Yes, bless her heart!" repeated Marian. "And to think that I used to dine with the Egertons and they with me! I had a tiff with Kate Egerton once, when we were both on the board of a swell charity, and she went under in the fray. She little knows how Time's whirligig is bringing her revenge to-day! The one thing that bothers me, Agnes, is Doctor Cotesworth finding out my secret."

"My child, it had to be. With ye so ill, and me so scared, and he that I'd known through his visits to the Lorimer family, what could I do but fetch him here? And then he sort o' found us out."

"I know; and he in turn gave us away to our good angel, Lina Thurston," said Marian, now on her knees packing away the pretty gewgaws she had completed. "I don't blame you in the least, Agnes dear; you couldn't have kept it in, any more than we could have lived without Lina Thurston getting me that first work for Laferrière, and buying me the materials. Like the lady she is, Lina took back the money she'd advanced for that stuff, as soon as I'd made the first sales. Just wait till some of Kate Egerton's pals ask her where she got these favors, and Mrs. Hatch will have her hands full of orders for more. We'll get out of this house, then, Agnes, in double-quick time. I'll have a tidy little showroom, where ladies will like to come, and a forewoman who knows her business in witching customers. Trust me for original ideas and all the rest. Why, we'll be rolling in money, Agnes, and have—don't jump out of your boots—chicken twice a week!"

Agnes, busy in her corner with the gas

stove, heaved a sigh, and looked at her charge doubtfully.

"What is it, nursey? Out with it! I see you have some deep-dyed conviction you're afraid to speak."

"Dear, it's about Dr. Cotesworth. He that's thought ye the beauty of the world ever since he was a lad, and ye a young married lady in your husband's home."

"Now, Agnes, old girl, none of your palaver on that question," was the answer, while Marian's head dived deep into the box. "Trust an old maid for romantic fancies!"

"My dear, he's the salt of the earth; he's——"

"Then Lina Thurston's bread will be well sprinkled with him," cried Mrs. Hatch. "It was you yourself who told me they are engaged."

"Servants' hall gossip's all I have to go on," replied Agnes, turning the half of her vaunted chicken on the grill. "They did say Miss Thurston had always fancied him

—but since he's found ye again, poor gentleman, he's looked another way. And if ye hadn't bluffed him off——"

"Not one word, you match-maker! Of all the preposterous fancies, that's the worst. When our two benefactors marry each other, Agnes, we will send them the biggest, fluffiest sort of a lamp-shade, with your compliments and mine——"

"It's queer, his having stopped away so long now—he that stretched out his hand to help ye, that watched over ye as anxiously as I. Ah! childie, ye can't help yourself—ye fascinate everybody, old and young. I can't mistake the looks I've seen him turn on ye. And they do say he's going to leave the country and settle in one o' them far-away places in South America or China or somewheres. When he's gone, and there's no callin' him back, perhaps you'll be sorry ye made so light o' him."

"But I don't make light of Robert Cotesworth, Agnes. God knows I don't. He's a big, true man, if ever one was—a good

gallant gentleman; and what he has been to me—poor waif fallen across his pathway—is laid up in heaven to his account. But it's a girl like Lina who ought to walk beside him in the future—he's her kind, she is. Do you think I'd be base enough to use my poor little chance to stand between them? Ah, no, Agnes, my day is done; the sea has swallowed up my setting star."

"Come, come, child; if it bothers ye I'll not mention his name again. Here's your tray, and I've cleared the table. Sit ye down and eat every bit of this."

Marian sighed again, then smiled, and obediently seated herself before the tray.

"Oh, how good it smells!" she exclaimed, in answer to the old woman's look of eager pride. "Agnes, you are a trump at cooking, as at everything else. Now bring your own plate and cup and sit on the other side."

"My child, I tell ye I've had my dinner," protested Agnes.

"Yesterday, I dare say, you pious deceiver. Now mind me, old girl, or I'll not

eat a mouthful. Take your full share, and we'll fairly riot over our first square meal in the last three days."

However, Marian's appetite was soon satisfied, while the older woman ate with healthy hunger, and meanwhile regarded, with covert yearning and anxiety, the still brilliant though wasted apparition opposite.

Deep down in Marian's long-sealed heart she had become aware of the springing up of a new and delicious emotion—an emotion that was yet so unduly hers, she thought, that she hung her head in consciousness of desire to appropriate and indulge it. A week or two before, when Robert Cotesworth made his visit the occasion of a tentative appeal to this feeling, she had laughed bitterly at the idea of its possible existence. Now—now— Was it because the old woman's gossip had put her in possession of the fact of his determination to leave the country, faintly outlined in his last talk with her? What else could have worked the miracle but the thought of long parting from

one on whom she had come to lean, with utter dependence, for every hope of health and strength and daily sympathy?

"Ye don't like it?" asked Agnes, crestfallen.

"My luncheon? Indeed, yes! Immensely!" ecstatically exclaimed Mrs. Hatch. "Haven't I eaten more than in a long, long time?"

"Well, dear, now you're strengthened a bit, I've got a surprise for ye. What'll ye say to our darling bride being on her way home? Yes, true enough, they're due on the *Campania* to-morrow, early. Miss Thurston told me, and said I was to let ye know it by degrees, but there aren't any degrees in the likes o' that, are there?"

"Agnes, you're like a sunburst!" cried Mrs. Hatch, radiantly. "But a moment ago I was thinking of how far-reaching and wide-spreading are the results of our own wrong actions, wondering why I might not dare to feel glad again in life. Now I am glad—healthily glad—glad with a joy of

which no man, no moralist, no verdict of the world may rob me."

"When you're feeling black-like inside o' ye, dear, always think about your child. I've noticed it never fails to do ye good."

"I do. I do think of her. Oh, my Gladys, my Gladys! Agnes, how grand that she is coming home! Though I may never look at her or speak to her, I'll know she's near. I'll picture her, dream of her, as of old. Never can I forget the touch of her warm, strong young hand, the sweet odor of her breath, the soft texture of her flesh—*my* flesh, Agnes—that day, that beautiful day when I gained her—that hideous day when I lost her."

"My poor dear, something tells me you'll see her again. God couldn't be cruel enough to shut ye out from one more chance. Let's hope, anyhow; and now, child, ye must lie down and rest a bit, and let me finish packing all these here things. The expressman will call for them at four."

"Go away, Agnes. Don't you touch my

playthings," cried Marian, wilfully, springing to her feet, then going down on her knees again before the packing-case. "See! I'll finish them beautifully. Since you said that I might chance to see my child—wildly improbable though I feel such a hope to be—I have got new life in my veins. You are right, Agnes—God is just, not cruel, and maybe He'll take into account what I've done since—not before—I went under the ban."

As one by one the bright emblems of a gayer life than hers passed into eclipse in the packing-case, the room, denuded of its finery, was revealed in all its sordidness and poverty. The hot afternoon melted into a hotter night. A teething child in the front apartment adjoining cried all through the long, stifling early hours, until, in despair, Marian stole forth to seek it, and carrying the little sufferer out on the fire-escape, sat with it there, wooing the breeze of dawn, while the mother found merciful repose.

The baby dozed, but its watcher kept

open-eyed vigil. She was thinking that her own child was on the sea, sailing down the coast, nearing the friendly harbor. Again and again she prayed God to speed her beloved safely. Just then the whole world was narrowed for her to the confines of a single ship. The months of blank desperation following her daring visit to her old home, the near peril of death she had passed through, the new element strangely injected into her life and rigorously excluded from it, the reawakening to an existence of toil and stress, the darkness of the future—all were now merged in tumultuous joy at the thought of her child's vicinity.

Spite of the wretched night, Marian woke from a brief morning doze brighter and stronger apparently than Agnes had seen her in some weeks. Out of her garden of new-budding hopes the "black bat night had flown." For a morning paper had announced the arrival at the dock, earlier than expected, owing to an unprecedentedly quick

run, of the steamer bearing, among others of interest to the fashionable world, the newly married pair, Mr. and Mrs. John Adrian, *en route* to their Adirondack camp.

## VII

LATER in the day, Miss Lina Thurston, clad in cool, refreshing muslins, wearing a shady hat and carrying in her arms a great sheaf of Summer flowers, descended from a hansom before Mrs. Hatch's door. Having once spent six months in a nurses' settlement in a congested district of the town, the sights and sounds of poverty were as familiar to her as daily bread. She now glided between the groups of sidewalk children, distributing to them a posy apiece from her armful, and then ran lightly up the steps to Marian's quarters, leaving behind her a trail of fragrance from sweet peas and nodding roses. She found Marian sitting at her usual table engaged in making candle-shades, but looking like a new woman, so Lina averred.

"Not *the* new woman, please. I'm just

the old, old kind, living on emotions and impulses, pinning my everlasting happiness on the sleeve of chance, and buoyed up by my own imagination of things rarely realized. To-day, however, I do feel strangely better, and these flowers of yours will complete the cure. Quick, Agnes! every glass and pitcher you can trump up, and let me riot in the beauties! You yourself make me think of some flower, Miss Thurston, but I have not yet found which one."

"I'll tell you," said Lina, smiling. "Peach blossom—not especially good looking, and concealing a bitter flavor."

"Mignonette, rather," corrected Marian, "with its clean, wholesome, health-giving perfume. Dear friend, one can never say the really grateful things one feels. It's only pretty, meaningless phrases that run off the tongue trippingly. But always remember that you've lifted me out of the valley of desolation. It's something to have done that for a fellow-being, isn't it? Now, I must tell you that Mrs. Egerton's huge case

full of things got off safely, yesterday, and, if I do say it, will do credit to your recommendation. When I get the money for them, and for more work ordered by Laferrière, we'll be passing rich, Agnes and I. We're even talking about moving out of this house into better rooms, and in the Autumn spreading our wings and opening a little shop. Of course, capital's the rub."

"I'll help you," said Lina, looking at her with surprise, so gay, so light of heart she seemed. "I was just going to make an offer to become a 'silent partner,' or whatever you like to call it, in your venture. I've a small sum lying idle that I am glad to invest so well. You see, I count largely on your exquisite taste in purveying to the *monde où l'on s'amuse*."

"You dear, blessed woman!" cried Marian, overjoyed. "That rolls the last stone out of my path, since Dr. Cotesworth assures me that with care, and by avoiding any great mental strain, I am good for the ordinary span of life."

"He has not, then, convinced you that you need someone to take absolute, exclusive care of you?" interrogated Lina, brusquely.

Marian looked at her in surprise, then, very gently, answered:

"You know him, dear lady. It was he who brought you to me in my time of cruelest stress. Can't you realize that even the most clever and self-reliant man may sometimes act on an impulse of pity, through an obsession of missionary zeal? Ah! I am mocking, as usual; but don't mind. Whatever I may do, or leave undone, where he's concerned, it's through no lack of appreciation or gratitude."

"Do you know that he is going away—that he is exiling himself from home and everything?"

"I know that in time he will see what is truly best for him," said Marian, very low.

"Mrs. Lorimer, you and I believe in each other, don't we?" answered Lina, bravely. "Very well, then. Let me tell you that

Robert Cotesworth will not change. Put from your mind any cobweb of delusion on that score, and trust me implicitly that it is better so. Only, it seems cruel to let him go—alone. There, I know you are sore and weak and timid still; but neither is a child, or yet accountable to any human being. It is a new life I am pointing out to you, and over yonder, with half a world between you and your past, you may win the chance you've lost here. Now, I won't let you answer me—not a word, please; you are not yet ready for the new view of things."

"Had ever good man so noble an ambassador?" cried Marian, tears rushing to her eyes. "But you are right—I am not fit to speak of it. Just now I am all a mother. Early this morning Agnes stole out into the street to buy a newspaper, and since I have seen the glorious news that Gladys has returned, I can think of nothing else."

"Then you can bear hearing that I have just come from her," said Miss Thurston,

scrutinizing the feeble, palpitating, yearning creature with grave sympathy.

During the weeks of her visitations to old Agnes's shabby abode, the friendship that had grown up between Miss Thurston and the poor waif of circumstance had strengthened into a devotion such as the world rarely sees among their sex. Lina, like Dr. Cotesworth, possessed by the indestructible charm of Marian's personality, had, like Cotesworth also, come to estimate her at her true worth. And when Lina realized that Cotesworth had, without warning, found himself surrendered heart and soul to a passion for Marian absorbing the full power of his manhood, she put aside self and gave rein to her vast desire to reconstruct the life of hapless Mrs. Hatch. To save Marian seemed to Lina the fulfilment of all her dreams of service to her fellow-beings. And to serve Robert Cotesworth, with whom for some years past she had worked hand in hand in the cause of charity, poor Lina would have renounced—did renounce, as we have

seen—her own most secret hopes of happiness.

At this juncture, coming as she did from a special mission in Marian's behalf, to which Cotesworth, still sore from his rejection by Mrs. Hatch, and making preparations for a long absence from his native land, had inspired her, Miss Thurston gave herself the full joy of savoring good news in the act of distributing it. While Marian lay back in her chair, listening in fascinated silence, Lina told her all the details of her visit to the Adrians at the hotel where they were stopping on their way through town. Marian drank in every item about her child's beauty and radiant happiness, about Adrian's sayings to his young wife, about Gladys's pretty rejoinders.

"But I must not tire you," Lina said, suddenly, pulling herself up in some alarm for the result.

"Tire me!" cried Mrs. Hatch. "You are giving me oxygen to live on!"

"Because," said Lina, deliberately and

with tender intonation, "all I have said is only by way of preparing you for something better."

"Something better?"

"Mrs. Lorimer, don't let yourself get excited. Your doctor has given me leave to tell you——"

"What has Dr. Cotesworth got to do with it?" exclaimed Marian, puzzled.

"Don't you know he is an intimate friend of Mr. Adrian? He is also one of the biggest-hearted men I know. He took upon himself the responsibility of sending me to tell Mr. Adrian of your illness and your whereabouts. Of course, I took occasion to see Mr. Adrian apart from Gladys. I believe—I am sure—she has never yet been told——"

"Better so," said Marian, crimsoning.

"But nobody could have been nicer than Mr. Adrian. He was greatly shocked and touched by my story of your illness—and . . . Agnes, do you come and stand by Mrs. Lorimer while I tell her my best news of all."

"Gladys is coming here?" cried Marian, electrically. "Oh, yes! I see it in your eyes, I hear it in the tremor of your voice. Ah, God is merciful!"

"Mr. Adrian will bring his wife to look up her old nurse," said Lina, steadily, while Agnes slipped a sturdy arm around Marian's shoulders.

"Now?—soon?—to-day?" faltered Marian, passionately glad.

"Now, almost immediately—it was his first impulse. He felt that you ought to see her, to be encouraged to get well. But you won't forget, Agnes—you won't let her forget—that Dr. Cotesworth is emphatic against her giving way to any sudden emotion."

"I know—I'm so grateful to him for this thought, and to you for executing it, I'll submit to anything."

"I rather think he will find it best to be here when they are," said Lina, a purple flush mounting around her eyes. "The truth is, I saw him for a moment when I came away from them."

"Oh, what plotters and planners you all are, and all against one poor little broken woman!" cried joyous Marian, her thoughts bounding ahead to the goal where they oftenest converged. "If you could ever feel the sudden delicious warmth that has come into my heart! Gladys here! my baby! my beloved!"

Her voice fell to so soft a note it might have been the echo of a dream. She closed her eyes in a little doze inspired by weakness, and Lina Thurston, with a final keen pang, thought she had never seen her rival look more beautiful. Roughly, almost, so quick the movement was, she leaned over and kissed Marian on the brow, then hurried from the room, while keen-sighted old Agnes, used as she was to Miss Thurston's abrupt ways, looked after her with adoring gratitude, the greater because of her partial comprehension of affairs.

"Miss Thurston is gone?" cried Marian, rousing presently. "Oh, Agnes, it's our guardian angel who has taken flight!"

"Never mind sorrowing after her, dearie," said Agnes, who was frantically putting the room to rights. "She's got her reward laid up above, for sure. The thing that's bothering me is that ye ought to change your dress."

"So I ought!" exclaimed Marian, surveying herself ruefully. "Get me that cream muslin—or no, my white-and-black."

"My dear, I just can't; we ate them both up last week, when things were at their worst. I'd been hoping to save enough to get them out of pawn," answered Agnes, dolefully.

"Never mind; Gladys won't know your room-mate, and Adrian won't care. Brush my hair, Agnes, you old duck. I'm very thin, and decidedly shabby, but I'll have to do as I am."

"Do ye remember, lovie," suggested the old nurse, "how once ye used to give me finery I couldn't use, and you'd laugh at me for stowing it away in camphor and the like? Well, there was a Paris tea-gown, of a white

crêpy stuff, trimmed with lace; ye got tired of it, and told me to never let ye look at it again. It wasn't half-worn, and I've got it yet."

"Why haven't you pawned that, too, you miser? What do you mean by hoarding the best of the batch?" asked Marian, rallyingly.

"I—I was just keeping it."

"For what?" queried Marian.

"For old times' sake, sure," said the woman, hurrying into the next room, holding one hand across her heart, as if Marian could see it bursting with the sorrowful intent, long treasured there, to save this special garment for the last toilette of her charge.

"How odd and jerky Agnes is to-day," thought Mrs. Hatch, settling and resettling Lina's flowers in their vases, which, as now arranged on her table, made a frame-work for her noble head and bust. "I suppose she's fairly overcome by the thought of her little Gladys coming here. I'm not over-

come. I'm only calm and proud and thankful. I want to do nothing that will betray me to my child."

Agnes, who had been stooping over an ancient trunk in the inner room, now returned, carrying across her arms a fluttering garment of white, filmy stuff, from whose folds floated a faint odor of violets. At sight of it Marian's face changed to a sudden wistful pensiveness. Taking it across her lap, she stroked it curiously.

"Ah," she said, half to herself, "I remember so well the day I bought it at Paquin's. Dick helped me to choose it—that was why I gave it up afterward—I couldn't bear the sting of remembering happier times. We came home to our hotel in the Rue Castiglione and drove out to the races at Auteuil afterward. All Paris was in the Bois that day of June. The carriages were four abreast, moving at a snail's pace in the alleys, all filled with pretty women and idle men. The sidewalks were crowded with people, the fountains and bands were play-

ing, the horse-chestnut blossoms rose like pink spires on the trees, birds were singing everywhere, and sunshine, flowers, verdant slopes and vistas greeted us on all sides. I was beautifully dressed, and Dick sat beside me in the victoria, always whispering that he had as yet seen no woman to match his little wife in looks and *chic*. God! why couldn't that have lasted? Why does nothing last, except envy and spite and malice and all uncharitableness? I loved him so then I drank in his every word like gospel. Then the races were so gay, and we drove back, as we came, through a world *en fête*, and had our little dinner in our rooms, when Dick insisted I should wear this for him. *This*, for *him!* How he kissed my arms where the sleeves fell away! They were round and full and firm, not poor, wasted sticks like these. *This*, for *him!* Agnes, it would kill me to put it on again."

"Come, child, let me do your hair," said Agnes, who had paid little heed to her rhapsody.

"No, I'll go in and loosen it a little, and try to let it shade my face. I'm not looking ill enough to repel a young person, am I, Agnes?" she added, anxiously.

"There'll never be one to look sweeter and finer and more like the tip-top quality," asseverated the nurse, stoutly. "But ye mustn't tire yourself, dearie; whatever ye do, don't get tired."

Marian promised, and went off to her room, shutting behind her the sliding-doors, and, at the last moment, looking back between them to reassure anxious Agnes with a caressing smile.

Hardly had she vanished from the scene when a step was heard on the landing, followed by a knock, and Agnes opened the door to Jack Adrian.

"Oh, Mr. Adrian, it's as welcome as flowers in May ye are," exclaimed the nurse, joyously. In his manly and prosperous presence she promptly forecast relief from her poignant anxiety to make their livelihood assured.

Jack came in gravely, a line across his

brow, looking about him as if dreading to meet what might be awaiting him.

"Agnes, this is a distressing story Miss Thurston has brought me from Dr. Cotesworth," he said, in an undertone. "Where is she?"

"In yonder," signaled Agnes. "Yes, it's sad, sir; but you'll not think, to look at her now, how sad it has been. But she's like one made young again by the news of your coming. If only she could have a mind at rest, sir, I believe she'd get a new chance at living."

"Why was not I informed of her illness?" he asked. "Surely I should have known. I, not you, should have borne the burden. She should never have dropped to this."

"She had promised ye, sir, that ye should never hear of her again, and my poor lady always kept her word."

"True, but I never meant to hold her to that pledge. Agnes, your child is down below, in the carriage. She knows nothing, suspects nothing, of the real object of this

visit. She believes she is coming to rout you out and take you away, to be part of our establishment henceforward. For heaven's sake, advise me what to do with her."

"Fetch her up, sir, and let nature point the way."

"I am afraid she ought to know about her mother," he said, moodily.

"I think so, sir. It's the one that suffered birth pangs for her to live," answered Agnes. "And so good, so patient, so high-minded and brave. Believe me, Mr. Adrian, your wife will never be ashamed to own my poor darling for her mother."

"I know, I know," he hastened to say; "but Gladys is so bright and girlish still. Our honeymoon has never waned. It has been a dream of joy."

"Ye can't shut out sorrow, Mr. Adrian, from any woman's life. And Gladys, like her mother, was made to bend, not break."

"I'll go for her," he said, resolutely. "Do you tell the mother we have come."

His turn of the door knob was met by that

of Gladys on the other side. She ran in, beaming, and fell on Agnes's neck.

"If you two think I mean to stop down stairs and play royalty on its rounds a moment longer!" she exclaimed, radiantly. "Jack knew that the greatest treat he could give me, on the first day, was to come over here and capture you, nursey darling! Now you're ours from this day forth—you're going to darn our stockings and keep those piles of bridal linen in the most splendid order, and generally 'boss' our maids. Isn't that a career for you, old thing? Answer and say you're glad."

In this merry hectoring, in the birdlike movements of the speaker's head, in the loving imperiousness of her manner, Agnes felt that the mother was repeated.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, vaguely, disappearing.

Gladys, a little taken aback at the nurse's abrupt exit, attributed it to emotion over their reunion. In the interval of waiting she fluttered like a butterfly about the room,

handling its belongings with the freedom of a petted juvenile.

"What a lot of lovely flowers Agnes has, and how well she's learned to group them! I recognize that old china cat and dog on the mantelpiece, Jack. I bought them for her at a fair, ages ago, when I was eight. This old workbox, too, that I was never allowed to play with! I wonder I dare touch it now. These shells—old servants always run to shells—I used to put them to my ear, like this, and listen—listen for the voice of the sea she told me I could hear. Oh, what old frights of photographs! Is there anything so subduing to one's pride as to come upon one's former self, with whom one was so satisfied? Here I am, in all ages and stages—on a rock by an imaginary lake, on my donkey, riding on a bough, and in my first ball-gown. Oh, horrid little thing! how you simper!" and merrily she turned the offending face to the wall.

"Here's a picture I never saw before, Jack," she exclaimed, suddenly, pouncing on

a faded photograph in a frame surrounded by china forget-me-nots. "Agnes must have had it hid away—but why? Jack! *I've* seen this woman! Awfully pretty she must have been, in spite of that funny hairdressing and gown. Tell me, dear—you know me better than I know myself—where have I met her, recently? Not a round and dimpled face, youthful and smiling like this, but thinner, paler, with the eyes full of unshed tears. Jack, dearest, something goes out from my heart to her—I know not what——"

"Gladys, my sweetheart," said Adrian, strongly moved, "doesn't that something tell you you are looking at your mother?"

"Then why have they never shown it to me before?" she cried. "Why have I been always told there was no likeness of her in existence?"

"My darling, it was thought best to keep you in ignorance. The circumstances under which you and your mother parted were not ordinary ones—they were very, very sad. The knowledge would have darkened your

young life. Your father could not bear to have her alluded to. She offended him, and he never forgave her."

"What do you mean?" she said, withdrawing herself from his arm-clasp, and blushing deeply.

"Gladys, your mother did not die. She was separated by law from your father, and went to live far away from him. She is living still."

"But I have seen her, spoken to her, I tell you," she said, bewildered. "Oh, why doesn't it come to me when and how?"

"My own wife," said Adrian, again drawing her to his heart, "you need all your self-control, for you are about to meet the poor lady whose life since she gave you up has been everything that is true and noble. It was not your nurse, but your mother, whom I brought you here to see—your mother, who has been dangerously ill, and is still in the most pitiful condition. All we can do, darling, won't be enough to make up to her for what she's suffered here."

He felt her heart beat wildly against his own; felt the tremor of intense feeling that shook her frame, her hands fluttering in his like prison birds. But speech from either was arrested by the sliding back of the middle doors in their grooves. Marian, clad all in white, a sweet, piteous look in her eyes, the rose bloom of girlhood returned to her cheeks, held out her arms to Gladys, who flew to her embrace.

"It was you, mother, who came to me on the day before my wedding?" asked the girl, presently, when she sat close by the chair into which Marian had dropped, weak from emotion, but happy beyond all words.

"Yes, my own love; I could not resist it. It was rash, foolish, unforgivable, perhaps, but the only way to see and touch my child."

"And *you* sent this chain and pendant I always wear? See! I have it on now, and Jack has never pretended to be jealous."

"Yes, yes!" said Marian, eagerly.

"Often and often have I thought of you,

and not even to Jack have I spoken of the strange thrill your touch gave me."

"My child, my little one, joy of my heart!" murmured the mother in her ear, "in this moment I'm living all the years I've missed of you; but we won't think, won't speak, of what is gone. It's the future—the bright, glorious future—that concerns us. To think that——"

Her words seemed to trail, then stopped abruptly. Her head fell back, her hand clutched at her heart.

"Jack! Agnes!" cried Gladys, in terror, "come to her!"

Agnes and Adrian, who had withdrawn out of earshot of mother and child, hastened to Marian's aid. The experienced eye of the nurse saw at once that the present attack differed in some respects from those preceding it, and it was with a feeling of enormous relief that she was called to the door to admit Dr. Cotesworth, whose arrival had been deferred until this momentous crisis of affairs.

Adrian, who believed Marian to be dying, was torn between his desire to remove Gladys from the painful scene and his conviction that her place was by her mother's side. He therefore welcomed appreciably Cotesworth's prompt suggestion that his patient, on recovering from what might probably prove a rather more obstinate attack than usual of a familiar malady, would be far better left alone in his hands and the nurse's.

So Gladys, yearning to remain, was carried off by Jack, her final act being to kneel beside her mother's fainting form and fondly kiss her hand. It needed all of Dr. Cotesworth's authority to convince her that this sudden close of an opening chapter of delight was not, of necessity, a last farewell. Her plaintive and girlish assurance that she would trust all to him rang in the physician's ears, and returned to him again and again during his efforts to snatch poor Marian anew from the jaws of the grim enemy, who seemed ever to await her, hungering.

"Why didn't you let me go?" Marian

asked Cotesworth, as he watched her again struggle back into life and a sense of its realities. Her old whimsical impetuosity of manner gave him cheering reassurance that it was her very self whom he had regained. He answered her with a smile, repeating what she had bid him keep to himself forever.

"Oh, I meant because it was all just right then, and it can never be right again," she said, hastily. "I have tasted a supreme delight, and Gladys thinks she has recovered a lost treasure. But now that they have got me back, what in the world can Jack and my darling do with me? This old trump of an Agnes would rather starve with me than leave me to go live in their luxury. You, the best and truest friend woman ever had—I'm blighting your career; and what you wanted me to do would have brought down on you all the thousand tongues of scandal. The plain truth is, I'm a problem, a superfluity, a block in everybody's path—nobody can *afford* to indulge in me. My death

would set everything straight! You who have forced me to live, tell me what's to become of me? You are very clever, Dr. Cotesworth, very big and positive, and sure of yourself; but if you lived a thousand years you could never solve that riddle, and you needn't try."

"Nonsense! That's just what I mean to do," he answered, in a burst of such honest masculine conviction that a flicker of the old fun came into her eyes, to be followed by a gush of grateful tears.

Was what he wished, and Agnes wished with all her loyal old heart, ever to come to pass? They thought so, but already Marian's higher self had decided otherwise.

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